

## Adapt and Change: Stories of Moving from Face to Face Teaching to Online Teaching

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In the spring of 2020 the pace of change suddenly increased to light speed for instructors. The pivot from face to face courses to remote/distance/online was so fast our heads were spinning. The old definitions of “distance learning” or “online learning” suddenly became fluid as the requirements of the pandemic forced students and instructors apart. Instructors and students learned how to use new platforms, became acutely aware of the quality of their internet, learned more about their browsers, understood the importance of microphones, and found new ways to sit with their computers. Instructors didn’t stop caring about their students; that didn’t change. But how we expressed our care and reached out to our students changed for many instructors who had not planned on joining their colleagues already online. Student who thought they could avoid online classes could no longer. So, there we were: online, alone, together.

A university is a host of team members. So, when instructors scramble to meet the new needs of learning during a pandemic, a lot of other people are scrambling right beside them: instructional designers, the staff in the information technology office, advisors, the staff in student life, and so many others. For instructors who had been teaching online for a while already, the change was not so difficult, but they took on more responsibilities as they helped support their colleagues who were just jumping into the pool.

One challenge of this change was that it shone a light on the inequities of access to technology that had been growing as technology has become more and more a part of educational institutions. Expecting the transition to go smoothly may have been wishful thinking. Not all students or instructors had cameras and microphones on their computers; some did not have computers or had older versions that would not update to accommodate the new technologies. Some locations did not have Wi-Fi, and for some, with everybody home, the Wi-Fi people had was not robust enough to support two or three people in video meetings. In addition to technology assumptions being challenged, for students and instructors unfamiliar

with online learning, the new habits required to be successful online were surprising. Self-regulation, time management, and technological grit to figure out what to do when the tech stops working are all important skills that need to be developed and cultivated. They do not come naturally. Teaching and learning online can be a great experience, but it takes more time, more specific communication, and a questioning of assumptions of what students already know about the technology and what they need to know to be successful. Effective teaching online also requires a significantly different skill set for instructors.

As we move forward, the stories of instructors and the people who support them are important to hear. These stories may be individual to each person's experience, but if we hear enough stories from others, we can be more aware of our own, know that we are not alone, and learn from what our colleagues have learned. We may be alone in front of our computers, but we are together as people who want to create good learning experiences for our students and for each other. Change can be painful, but by supporting each other, we can minimize the frustration and struggles associated with any new endeavor.

A common theme that instructors, faculty developers, and instructional designers identified was the problem of losing face to face communication. Many turned to video conferencing tools, but the context rich environment of the face to face class is not duplicated in video conferencing. This loss requires a change of strategy which demands a great deal of creativity and technical knowledge to solve. First the technology has to be available in hardware, software, and bandwidth. Then the instructor needs time to learn the possibilities and creatively address how to help students use these new approaches to learn the content of the course. This is intensive work for both instructors and students, and it takes time. Sharing our stories of responding to this work can be a way for us to support each other with patience and compassion.

### **Perspective from classroom instructors: going face to face to online**

#### **Instructor 1: Classroom Instructor**

We were “warned” about 10 days before the shut-down that that might happen, and we should think about how we would then teach our students from a distance. I therefore had a plan in mind when the lock-down eventually came, but I still had to implement my plan. And for the implementation I only had one weekend before the first class took place. I am normally a teacher

who has things prepared well in advance. And all of a sudden, I had to go on a weekly basis. It therefore felt as if I was able to do little preparation.

I had one group of students for which I wanted to prepare material they could download from an e-learning platform. The students were then supposed to work through the material and upload the results of their own work so that the results could be corrected by me. For some of those weeks, the preparation was time-consuming as I felt giving the students a text without any comments was too difficult. I thus went through the texts and made notes, giving the students the information, I would have given them if we had been together in our classroom.

For two other classes, online meeting rooms were used where we could meet ‘in class.’ In that case, the additional preparation – compared to normal class preparation – was minor. It was merely the technical aspect, trying out different online meeting tools and find out which one would suit our purpose best. And, of course, informing the students how, when and where we would meet online.

Either option (material for download and online meeting) worked for the diligent and very interested students. I would even say that in both cases some students profited from this new way of teaching. In the group who downloaded their material, I had one student who tends to be a little bit slower and shy than others. This student took her time to prepare the assignments alone, handed all the assignments in and profited from my personal comments and corrections to such an extent that I could see her performance improving week by week.

In the groups with online meetings I had one group that is small anyway and was even smaller during the lockdown. One student who had missed some of the classes prior to the lockdown, showed up in the online meetings and was then able to fill in the gaps, so to speak.

The special circumstances reduced the pressure to get everything done. The atmosphere was more relaxed than normal at this time of the school year. (But this aspect would diminish if we were to continue online for a longer period of time.)

Attendance was generally not so good. In all my groups there is a group of hard core students who have participated regularly in the online scheme, but some of the students who, before the lockdown, had been almost always present in the classroom, did not show up with the same regularity or even showed up at all (technical problems; family-related problems; less interest in this less personal / social way of teaching).

For those students who have to travel for more than an hour in order to come to school, distance / online teaching is an advantage. Students can also be more selective about what class they want to attend (although they actually have to and are well advised to attend all the classes...)

For the group who gets downloaded material, preparation time and correction time are far more than in classroom situations. As far as the online meetings are concerned, I find it very difficult to concentrate. I miss “feeling” of knowing whether I reach everybody or whether they are able to following what is happening in class. Honestly, I have been pushing aside thoughts about what I will do differently for the fall semester if everything goes online again.

The institution itself provided us with access codes for different online meeting rooms and was open to suggestions made by colleagues who had already tried out some of the tools and were able to assess their performance. That was good. The aforementioned colleagues shared their experiences with everybody. I don’t know what support we will get in future. I actually fear that the “institution” will say that we all switched so rapidly to the new scheme that we obviously don’t need any further support. (They are wrong.)

## **Instructor 2: Classroom Instructor**

We did not get much time for preparation before going online. We knew that we would have to go online at some point, but then it happened within a few days. We discussed going online amongst colleagues in several online meetings. In the first week we had almost as many online meetings as online classes...

My classes went better than expected, although not everyone was prepared all the time, which is a bigger problem in online classes than in the classroom. Direct communication is a lot more difficult. Initially all the information was given out via e-mail, so students felt quite overwhelmed. It worked a lot better as soon as I started posting information on our learning management system. Teaching evolved after giving clearer instructions to students and swapping information with colleagues on what worked and what did not. I also got more information online on how to be a better online teacher (e.g. under <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/advice-online-teaching>), which helped a lot.

Online, the contact is less personal. You can ask students to turn on their cameras, but you cannot force them to turn the camera on. You cannot control whether they are doing other

things on the side – or are still even in the room. Online teaching, i.e. sitting in front of a screen for hours, is more tiring for both lecturers and students. I took longer breaks and asked my students to get up, open the window and move for a bit during the breaks.

The advantages of online learning include that students are less nervous to perform “in class”, especially in oral classes. People who live far away from the institute come to online classes more regularly (especially the earlier ones). We can record classes and post the recordings for students who could not attend at the time.

If fall classes all go online, I will inform the students in even more detail what exactly we will do in class and what is expected of them. The support I got from my institution included software licenses and online meetings to discuss best practices.

### **Instructor 3: Classroom Instructor and Unit Head**

We had all of one weekend to switch to online teaching. That put us under a lot of pressure, not only from trying to deal with the technology, but also reworking how we present information, the kinds of assignments, and how we plan to correct them. Not to mention testing!

I immediately had to reorient my teaching from student-centered to teacher-centered. I quickly had to rethink how I would present information and call on students so that even though I was doing most of the talking, students would still have a chance to participate. How would I hold their interest and keep them involved?

The resulting classes were okay, but not great. The technology makes it possible, but it has its drawbacks, especially for language instruction. Sometimes the audio and video are not in synch which also makes it more difficult to communicate. When there are skips in the audio and frozen video moments, that totally breaks the communication if only briefly. For language learners, that’s an added difficulty.

Also, some programs only let you see five or so students across the top of the page when you show a document. That doesn’t work very well because then you don’t know if they have questions, if they are listening, or if they are even sitting at the computer! A further challenge is that some students live in areas where they don’t have internet. These students have either given up coming to class or they use their phones. Phones work to some extent, but clearly a very small screen is limiting. Additionally, sometimes class had to end early due to technical difficulties. When that happened, I posted assignments on our interactive website for teachers and students.

I dislike talking to a black square with initials on it (when students have no camera or turn off the video). It's not like talking on the phone where you don't expect to see the person. And as for turn taking, that's impossible unless you call on people. I need to see my students in order to register if they have questions (raised hands) or if they are following me (facial expressions). And it is weird when they simply get up and leave. Then of course, sometimes everything freezes, or the platform is having problems, and you can't even start the class at all. Online teaching is definitely *not* ideal. And it is definitely *not* a classroom setting. At this point, my teaching is much more teacher-centered than when I'm in the classroom. I imagine there are programs that allow students to work in pairs or small groups, but I haven't figured that out yet and I doubt we'll be getting any kind of training at school.

I find online teaching to be more exhausting because I am 'on' most of the time; whereas in the classroom, students spend a good amount of time interacting with each other and discussions are in the group. In contrast, teaching online, I find myself talking more and, I imagine, somewhat louder than normal. As a result, my throat gets irritated and my voice gets weak.

What did not work at all was trying to teach Drama. This class thrives on students interacting with each other, body language, positioning, etc. It did not work. I gave up and simply posted plays for them to read with discussion questions, YouTube videos of sketches to watch and comment on, and assignments of sketches that they needed to create themselves.

Advantages? Hmm. I guess teaching online is better than canceling class altogether... Because we are likely to be back in the classroom in the fall, I have not given much thought to how I would teach online differently. All online from day one in the fall would be very difficult. I need time to establish a relationship with my students – get to know them, have them get to know me. I feel that online teaching has worked more or less for me because I had months of classroom interaction with them before we went online. The rapport established between the teacher and students is one of the primary reasons students work hard for some teachers and not others. They have to connect. I imagine that this connection will be difficult to establish online.

As we are already having some classes at the school, I expect that we'll be back to classroom teaching in the fall. I imagine that we'll have to alternate classes due to social distancing and the limited number of students allowed in a classroom. This could mean posting work online for the entire group to do and teaching half the group every other week. Or it could

mean teaching to half the students in the classroom and at the same time the other half tunes in at home via our video conferencing platform at home...

As head of the English department, I asked my teachers if any of them had any experience with online conferencing programs. Four teachers offered to hold a meeting for the department using different online video conferencing platforms (GoToMeeting, Webex, Zoom, Skype). The teacher leading it explained how it worked and people asked questions. It was good because we could ask specific questions based on our own needs. This was only done in my department.

One of my teachers made 4-page 'How To' for GoToMeeting, which he had been using for his online interpreting jobs. I passed that on to the administration and they decided to get licenses for all the teachers (first two months free). If the teachers want to continue using it in July, they have to pay for it themselves. If they don't want to pay for it, the school also has licenses for Webex, which the teachers can use for free.

The administration encouraged us to use programs of our choice (jitzy, Zoom, GoToMeeting, Webex, Skype, etc.) with the rationale that the more programs students became familiar with, the better. This led to some chaos in the beginning, but in the end, students adapted pretty quickly. We did not have any kind of formal in-service training in the use of these programs.

Online teaching has been problematic for many teachers – especially for language-focused classes and it has led to a dramatic drop in attendance. For lecture-type classes (about culture, history, etc.), some teachers have recorded themselves and made the videos available for students. That has worked well. Students can then watch these lecture classes whenever they want to. Overall, teachers were left to manage on our own and depending on the technical ability, curiosity, and creativity of the teacher, online teaching has been successful or a flop. If we have to teach online in the fall, the administration has agreed that we will take a week off from teaching to come up with a well-organized plan to implement.

#### **Instructor 4, classroom instructor and faculty developer**

It wasn't the ideal type of preparation. The amount of time we had to adjust to teaching online was short, but some preparation did happen. The extended spring break of an extra week was a blessing, but basically it was sort of a hurry-up-emergency-protocol how to move the

content online. But I worried about my students, you know? I'm not sure how they got ready to go online, if they did at all! I'm not sure they were all equipped for this kind of learning. The thing that I did do in the spring term was I just kept the synchronous lecture time on video chat so we have a lab in lecture time or lecture and lab. My thinking was hopefully they still have this time carved out in their schedule. These students didn't sign up for online classes, so I wanted to keep our online experience structured with the video meetings. At least they could see me, and we could talk. That immediacy would sort of keep the continuity a little bit and keep them from straying, so that personal relationship I had with them made a difference.

I think what worked was still having a time a set time where we met, and they were expected to do some things to structure their time management. However, I didn't want anyone who couldn't continue to meet at the synchronous meeting time to be penalized, and so I don't know if this was right or the perfect way to do it. All of the sessions were recorded for those who weren't able to attend, and others could go back if there was some concept we discussed that they just didn't understand. As expected, the higher achieving students, those that want to know everything, they went back in a few times. I can see that when we had a test, in the traffic picked up on the videos.

The other thing that worked really well was a pre-work component that they had to do. It was on the publisher materials, but they were questions that would pick out the concepts that I would cover in our synchronous video class, and then we would talk about those things in more detail in the class. Then they would do something immediately after class we would have a group session with 5 or 6 questions about the concepts that we just talked about. These groups worked pretty well, but it would have worked better if I could have visited the groups to see how they were doing.

The margins of error were so small, and everything had to be explained, explained, explained. Me being the class tech support was challenging because there were some issues that I couldn't resolve. Nevertheless, I liked rising to the challenge to try to figure out how to engage the students. Teaching online forced me to do some things differently, like the online group quizzes. I wouldn't think to have done that if the online environment hadn't forced me to think about ways to have them review in real time. When we go back to face to face I might do that again. Sure, I would try to squeeze every minute of the time and I think covering content is going to work, but it doesn't work. That's one of the lessons that I learned from this shift, so I liked the



being forced to kind of think outside of the box. I found making the shift from face to face to online teaching kind of like driving up a snowy hill: I couldn't go too fast because then I would skid, but if I slowed down I would get stuck. I am finding slow and steady change is working to get me to the top of this hill.

My advice to new online teachers is don't try to do everything you would do in a face to face class because it is impossible. Even in the best designed online classes, you have to be clear about what the learning outcomes are. You need to really get specific about how to address them, so in all my classes it has to be lean. That can be hard for me because all the things I lose in paring my courses down to the core is all the community kindness activities. I'm still working on this problem. It doesn't seem like it has to be this way.

### **Instructional Designers**

#### **J.A. Carter, University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College**

As a member of the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College Learning+ Teaching Center (L+TC) Team, faculty professional development is a large part of my responsibilities. The switch to remote learning and teaching challenged our standard practices, but thus far has produced surprisingly positive results that will forever alter our teaching and learning strategies. Our pedagogical strategy changed, the approach we have employed changed, and how we think about the future has changed.

Generally speaking, our L+TC promotes an active learning approach in its workshops and training sessions by prioritizing interactivity in our Center. Whether the topic was assessment, university policies, or exporting content from Blackboard, faculty could expect each session to include some form of activity in which they were engaged in small group discussions, using our four whiteboards to brainstorm, or creating products using our various technological resources.

As we moved to remote learning, there was concern that we would struggle to offer the same high-quality professional development. However, the mandate gave us no choice but to alter our strategies. We quickly arranged face-to-face trainings for our last two days on campus and worked with faculty on screen casting, video conferencing, and using various interactive tools in Canvas.

Training and support over the next several weeks were mainly done through one-on-one online meetings, emails, and resources, like Canvas guides, video tutorials, etc. After we learned summer semester would be online and fall semester may share the same fate, we determined one-on-one help was not sustainable. To address this, we created a new professional development strategy.

First, we created a 9-module, self-paced Canvas course called Preparing to Teach Online. This is a modified version of our semester-long Distance Learning Design Seminar required of all faculty who have never taught online. This course allows faculty to experience Canvas as a student, which most have not. It also guides them in creating their course, focusing on creating readiness assessments, aligned course and learning objectives, instructional materials, and assessments. Each participant requests feedback on their progress at the end of each module, and a facilitator reviews their course in Canvas. More than 100 people registered for this course.

In addition to this course, we developed an 8-part, 8-hour live Summer Institute. Across two weeks, we delivered live sessions via WebEx in which we introduced key aspects of online teaching and university technologies. Week 1 included sessions on getting started with online teaching, fostering engagement online, organizing courses in an online setting, and assessment. Week 2 addressed technologies for avoiding academic dishonesty, hosting live class sessions, fostering interactivity, and video discussions. Interestingly enough, between 75 and 100 people attended these sessions. This was the highest attendance for Learning + Teaching Center workshops we have ever had.

These offerings have taught us much that will influence our approach once we have returned to our physical space. First, it has taught us that our technology can and should be used to reach faculty who have historically had difficulty attending face-to-face sessions. Since no travel was required and recordings were provided, more of our part-time faculty were able to engage. We also saw participation beyond what our physical room would have allowed. Our remote sessions tended to have upwards of 50 participants while our physical Center only holds 30. Providing sessions with a face-to-face and online component can expand and diversify our participation.

As facilitators, we also identified good strategies for engaging participants. We learned that general requests for questions are ineffective. Instead we used the participant list to ask specific people for their thoughts. Since we know our faculty well, we were able to target people

from a wide array of disciplines. Through this we learned that our chemistry faculty had different needs and concerns than our languages faculty. Perhaps this should be obvious, but by identifying specific needs, we were able to directly point out technologies and strategies to address these requirements in the following sessions.

Finally, we have learned that just as with students, we must acknowledge that our faculty have very different skill sets, especially with regard to technology. Future professional development opportunities should acknowledge this and address skills from the basic to more advanced. As it is likely that we will not return to the way things were, it is in our best interest to motivate and support instructors in this new form of teaching. Instead of focusing on what we may have lost throughout this process, as facilitators we can focus instead on what knowledge we have gained.

### **The Lindner College of Business Learning and Instructional Design Team**

#### **Rebecca Williamson, Kelly Battles, and Danielle Lawrence**

We are a three-person instructional design team housed in the University of Cincinnati's Carl H. Lindner College of Business. We provide instructional design and multimedia consultation services for instructors teaching in both face-to-face and online modalities.

When the move to remote learning was announced, we initially experienced a rush of interest in video technologies, especially synchronous video conferencing, as faculty sought to recreate the face-to-face experience. We suspect that they perceived synchronous video as the closest substitution for face-to-face instruction. We've discovered, however, that it is faulty thinking to envision a recreation or duplication of the face-to-face experience. Rather, the move to remote learning ideally involves building a new experience. Our biggest takeaway is that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the face-to-face modality and the online modality. A three-hour synchronous video conference is in no way a substitute qualitatively for a three-hour live seminar. The ideal transition to remote learning involves what the theorist Claude Levi-Strauss would term *bricolage*, or a "making-do" with the available materials at hand to create something that is categorically different. We have a set of technological tools that in some cases may mimic the live learning environment, but to think of only mimicking that environment limits the imaginative capacity of what the online environment makes possible.

When providing a consultation for the move to remote learning, we ask the faculty member not only what they typically do in the live classroom, but more importantly, what their goal is with that particular activity, be it delivering content via lecture, engaging in a case study discussion, or having students deliver a group presentation. Do they want students to demonstrate knowledge? To practice communication skills? To interact with peers? To synthesize information verbally or in writing? To perform computations with or without the aid of study materials? The most successful conversions to remote have involved taking into consideration the instructional goals of the formerly face-to-face activities and translating them into a *bricolage* of asynchronous discussion forums, pre-recorded video lectures, exams that are designed to be open book, and judiciously used synchronous sessions.

Danielle: As the multimedia producer on our team, the biggest struggle for me was not using the tools that were available to us in our state-of-the-art production studio in Lindner Hall. Even before the pandemic, the popularity of academic videos/multimedia have been on the rise, so this quickly added to the equation. I had to learn how to coach faculty/staff members on how to create their own multimedia using the online tools that UC provides. Simple things like chunking your lectures, planning what you are going to cover, using a webcam, and testing out lighting/audio techniques were the main elements I would help coach our faculty on. Another important piece of producing all new material is making sure everything we create is accessible to students who have accessibility accommodation requests. What I have found during this whole process is that our faculty and staff are dedicated to doing whatever it takes to create the best learning experience for our students, even if that means quickly learning new techniques along the way.

Kelly: A big challenge I noticed right away was the assumption that the only way to convert to remote was to replace face-to-face class time with a synchronous video conferencing session held during the typical class meeting time, with little other modification. We worked on helping faculty understand the preference for asynchronous elements rather than synchronous, whether that took the form of shorter pre-recorded videos or online tools such as discussion boards to take the place of live discussion. We also noticed a heightened concern with academic integrity in online exams. While we did provide access to an online proctoring solution, we also encouraged faculty to embrace more frequent low-stakes assessments, as well as open-book, open-notes assessments.

Becky: Yes, a lot of our faculty originally felt that the best way to re-create the in-person experience online was to do synchronous WebEx meetings. We helped them focus on the learning goals and identifying alternative ways to get to those objectives that would work better in the remote environment. It can be hard to get out of the in-person mindset and to rethink how everything could work in an online environment. One nice thing that's been happening more lately is faculty are talking about things they're learning about Canvas or remote teaching that they plan on incorporating into their in-person classes, whenever those resume. It's been gratifying to hear that folks are finding new ways of doing things that they want to continue doing, instead of reverting back to whatever it was they did before. I've also noticed that folks teaching in the summer who made the shift to remote in the spring seem more comfortable with what they're doing and are asking different types of questions. It's no longer "what's the easiest way to get through this quickly?" it's more "how do I expand on what I've been doing, and what's the best way to do it?"

### **Summary**

All of these educators had little time to prepare for the shift to online teaching and learning. Now that plans to go online are clearer for coming semesters, there is a little more time to prepare, but for those still new to online teaching there are still many questions. Institutions are scrambling to find institution wide learning platforms and video applications to support teaching with greatly compressed timelines for adoptions. Instructors wanting to do their best by their students are not waiting for institutions to decide, and they are innovating on their own.

The two main concerns we are facing are time and community. It is clear that teaching and learning online are time intensive. An instructor needs much more time to organize the course in the learning management system, make the videos students will need, edit captioning, and prepare different kinds of activities for students to practice the course content. Providing the individual learning opportunities online also requires much more time for instructors to give helpful feedback. Following up with students who struggle with the online environment also adds time to the teaching process.

Building community also takes on a different tone in the move from face to face to online. Building online community is an especially difficult transition for faculty who have never been online students. Without the experience of extensive online community building, the online

environment can be a frustrating and confusing place to try to build the relationships that support effective learning. The “alone together” community of an online class can feel uncomfortable, and the limitations of online video conferencing inhibit the interactive communication style required for class discussions.

These difficulties, and the attendant challenges of negotiating the technology that mediates it all, will create both challenges and opportunities. It is possible that the external push of the pandemic has accelerated the pace of online teaching. When we return to being able to have more face to face courses again, perhaps the lessons instructors have learned about what works online can inform their teaching and learning. Although we have faced a number of challenges, we can value the opportunities we have had to revisit our teaching and see it in a new light.

The broader message is online learning has become more integrated into course offerings at a much higher level and will likely stay that way. Also, even if the technology of online teaching and learning is not in an instructor’s comfort zone, students are becoming more accustomed to it, and some even prefer it. This change to online teaching has taught us that we need to adapt and that, in fact, we *can* adapt. Even instructors who never imagined that they would design an online course and teach online are rising to the challenge. As instructors who want to do what is best for our students, it is our desire to try to help our students succeed, and if online is the only way available, then we can figure it out.

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