In the Classroom 61

Does the Pandemic Have You Moving Your Course Online in a Hurry?

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks for checking in and listening to this podcast. I really appreciate it. I know you could be doing other things. You probably maybe even are doing other things, but you're also hanging out with me, and especially during this time because it's gotten really crazy, so I really appreciate it. Well, as I said, things have gotten a little interesting. About a week ago our governor says, "We're moving everybody to an online environment." Can you imagine the chaos that this is causing? Not only our governor but schools across the nation are closing their face to face classes and moving them into an online format because of this pandemic, this coronavirus. Certainly, a disruption.

If you have never taught online, I expect that this is just a little unnerving. I really do appreciate that, but I want to assure you that you can make this transition successfully and smoothly, and this week I want to share some recommendations to help you do that, to help you make this transition as successful as possible. It's not going to be perfect. I'm not promising perfection. It's not going to be like your well-honed face to face classes that you've worked on for tens of years, no. We are basically dealing with an emergency and we have to work within those constraints. There's going to be some latitude that needs to be given in order to see that we do this successful. In next episode, I'm going to be sharing some tips for fellow instructional technologists, something that may make it easier the next time we have this emergency.

Let's get started. I'm going to basically talk about preparing to move online and actually moving online, but what I want to do is talk about, especially in this preparing to move online, you have to do some preparation, and one of the first places that I want you to prepare is your mindset. We didn't ask for the Coronavirus just as we don't ask for a tornado or a hurricane or a flood or an earthquake or other events that come up and totally disrupt what we have going on. Some of those have knocked out schools for a whole semester. We have, fortunately, in our capability, the ability to continue the semester because we have tools at our disposal that allows us this capability.

Over the years we have found out that learning online is no significantly different than learning face to face. The learning outcomes are the same. Do you have a preference? I'm sure you do because if you prefer to teach online, you probably were already there, but since you're not, then your preference is probably doing face to face and there's reasons why you do that, but we won't go into those, but what I'm asking you to do is develop a growth mindset. We talk about a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset. This came from Carol Dweck and we talk about it for our students, but this also applies to you. As Henry Ford once said, whether you think you can or think you can't, you're

right. If you think you cannot go online, you're right, you can't, but if you think you can, then I'm very confident that you can.

You have to treat this as a learning experience. It's not a learning experience you probably wanted at this moment in time, and that's fine, but open your-- Empty your cup. Just empty your cup and create a learning experience that will help you grow so that you will be successful to do what you primarily came to do. That's to help students learn about your subject. It's not going to be perfect, but your students who are going to follow your lead, if you go in this with a closed mind and that you express your unwillingness to do this, they're going to follow suit and it's going to make your life miserable. If you go in there saying, okay, here's the challenge and let's go tackle this challenge together, you're going to have a much more successful experience.

Be leaders in this and let's help our students be successful, so that way everyone will have as successful and ideally an enjoyable time. Number two, dealing with this preparation. You're not alone. This is a historical challenge that moving this many people into unfamiliar territory at one time. This is unprecedented, but you are not alone. Your colleagues are facing this, but you also have resources at your disposal. You have the internet, the internet has vast knowledge that people graciously have shared information with you on how to tackle any problem. You just put the question into Google and you'll start finding answers to solve your problems, but you also have instructional technologists and designers that are there to help you.

Please seek them out, but before you do, make sure that you take time to research your questions. Do a little learning first because you're not the only one. You are not alone. There are now, in the case of my community college, 100 new faculty that are going to be going online in one way or another. This has stressed my capacity to provide assistance to them. I encourage you to go out and learn as much as you can first. You don't have to learn it all at once, but focus on the just in time learning. Figure out what your problem is and how to overcome that. When you're stuck, your instructional technologists will be there to help you. You may actually want to touch base with them ahead of time, so they can point you in the right direction, but they are there for you.

I have looked at colleges across the nation. They are putting together wonderful resource lists, guidance, checklists, all kinds of to help faculty be as successful as possible. We want you to be successful. As an instructional technologist, I am building stuff on the fly to answer questions that have not been asked to me prior, but it takes time. I am also using the internet to help me build those resources. As I mentioned, educate yourself. Google, YouTube, certainly great places to ask questions about the different tools you're using, but each of those tools often has a help or a series of tutorials that will help you get through that. Spend some time, just go look at them with the common things that you need to do. What are those common things?

Well, I would recommend taking an inventory. Take an inventory of where you're currently at in the course. What do you still need to do? What assignments still need to happen, what assessments, what discussions do you want to happen and organize that inventory so that you could go out and start learning how to make those become a reality. The other thing that you want when you're taking inventory is also your

teaching space. Your teaching space is going to change. You're not going to be in the classroom that you were. You may be in your office or you may be at home. Do you have the necessary equipment to do the things that you want to do? If not, you need to let somebody know they can potentially help you with the equipment or you may have to look at a different strategy.

The next piece of advice in preparation is keep things simple. That you may have to simplify some things, that's not making it less robust. That just means making it simple. You do not have to do everything at once. A good online class may have lots of different things going on, but they weren't put there overnight. They were incrementally added and you're going to have to do the same thing. Start with the absolute minimums. What do you need to have in place at a minimum to get your next week moving forward? Then you can build upon that but keep it as simple as possible. Things that you want to consider is certainly uploading your content, creating a discussion.

How do you move your assignment online? How would you conduct office hours? Those are some things that you probably would need to have in place. Don't use every bell and whistle that's in the Learning Management System. It will overwhelm you and overwhelm your students, especially if they have not been in an online learning environment, but some of your students have. It would be great to find out who those students are because they can also guide you in effective practices that will help you. Stay flexible. Ensure that you keep breathing. Don't hyperventilate on me, but you need to stay flexible. If something's not working, ask for assistance or pivot, move to a different strategy. Teaching online is different than face to face.

The activities you would use are different. You have to make that pivot if you want to have a successful course. The other thing that you need to do while you're in preparation is also prepare your students that you need to communicate with your students, but also provide them supports. If they have not done an online course before, how do they do an online course? There should be an orientation available to them. Where is that orientation? Get them pointed in that direction so they get comfortable in how they are supposed to work in that particular environment. If you're going to use something like Zoom, there's tutorials for Zoom.

Point them to the tutorials so they are comfortable when you start having them go on to Zoom sessions. Just get them comfortable with the different technologies and provide those kinds of supports for your course. Those are some of the things that you need to think about if you're-- As you're preparing to go into this online environment. Let's talk about actually moving into the online environment. In the show notes, I have put in a lot of different resources that I would encourage you to go check out. Some of them are resources, podcasts that I've put together in the past. Some of them are coming from wonderful institutions across the nation that are providing guidance on how to do different things. This will help you with your transition to this temporary online format. You are not really building an online course at this moment. Now, this may later transform into an online course, but right now, you're just concerned about getting students to the goal line of getting through this class and we are pulling resources together. It may not necessarily be pretty but we're going to keep making them better throughout the course but that's what your goal is.

Moving online, if you're institution has a course template, I strongly recommend that you use it because in most cases it addresses a lot of the concerns that are in a quality review. It also helps keep things consistent for a student, that way they're not going from one course to another and it looks like it's an entirely different universe. You want to try keeping it as consistent as possible, so they can just focus on the content that you're providing.

The next thing is, focus on the nearest deadlines. Look at what needs to happen in the next week and actually build that out. Then work on the following week and build those items first. If you have certain readings that you want them to do make sure that you list them and let them know where the readings are or you may actually have to create documents that you will put in there so they can get to them, or create links to those documents.

What's the content that they're going to be looking at? Do you want them to discuss it? Well, then you probably need to put together a discussion so they can discuss that content which now changes because in a face-to-face class were you grading discussions? Or that was just a natural part of participation? For an online environment, you're probably going to need to grade that, so your syllabus has to change to reflect this change like now, how are you going to grade an online discussion? Do they have assignments? You may have been working on a paper and they had to do things in parts? Well, it's the next part coming up.

Building that assignment so you can get those documents and ideally grade them online and put a grade back to the students. Which means, you're also going to have to probably build an online grade book, so they know where they stand. Those are the things so focus on the nearest deadlines. Provide options wherever possible. This is really attached to universal design for learning and I'll put a link in the show notes talking about universal design for learning. It really focuses on supports in choice, but if you can provide a choice, I'd strongly recommend having some choices. You may put a text-only path through your course. Well, then you should also consider a multi-media path, so you can help as many students as possible. That's what universal design for learning does.

Synchronous course, right? Synchronous is you're getting together at one time in one place and having your face-to-face course. Zoom is a great tool for doing this that you can meet at a prescribed time as long as everybody has the capability to do so but you also need to consider students who had to move back home and back home maybe three time zones away. If you have a class at eight o'clock in the morning, that means they're going to have to be in class in five o'clock in the morning. Is that the best option? Something just to consider but asynchronous or synchronous courses there's definitely great strategies that you can apply there and I'll talk about it a little bit later.

Asynchronous, and this is really what I've been leaning towards through this whole episode, is putting your content in a Learning Management System. Students get to look at that material within a time frame but basically on their own time. This would certainly be my first recommendation in a course. Now, I've seen other things.

Logically explaining why you would go synchronous first but, for me, I would go asynchronous if I could.

Another consideration is communication. This is probably the most important aspect of all of it. Your communication is critical. You need to clearly communicate to students in different ways about what is happening. What is about to transpire. What should their expectations be? Things that you want to let them know is when is your communication cycle? When and how are you going to do it? You want to do that so you can reduce the number of channels that you have to communicate but initially, you're going to want to communicate by email. You're going to want to put something in the Learning Management System, in the announcements. If your class is not out yet before going online you're going to definitely want to talk to them face-to-face. Any different ways that you can communicate with them that you're going to want to do that. We have also a tool called Starfish. That's another tool I could reach out and communicate with students, but you're going to have to control that communication and make sure that you have regular communications with your students.

As you're moving online, here are some questions that you need to ask yourself and potential solutions for that. How and when will students get access to your material? In Learning Management Systems, you can control that. In a face-to-face classroom you hand it out when you're ready to hand it out but in a Learning Management System you can post it all there and they can have access to all of it. Or you can control when they see it but you need to figure out how and when students will get access to your material. How will they turn in their assignments? How will they get their assignments? There's a mechanism in a Learning Management System to do that.

How will you provide feedback on the different activities, assignments, and assessments that you give them? Definitely a capability in Learning Management System. How will you conduct your class discussions? Will they be asynchronous or will they be synchronous? Are you grading them? Are you not grading them? Those are definitely things you need to think about. What supports are you providing to your students, so they can successfully deal with these different technologies? Things to think about.

Definitely set up a grade book. Your students will very much appreciate it. Yes, absolutely. As a student they're interested in how successful they are and a grade book can help with that. Fortunately, Learning Management Systems have easy to use grade books, definitely set that up. Some other teaching strategies that you may want to consider. Conducting a class in Zoom. This would be asynchronous mode so some of the things that you definitely want to do is make sure students know how to use Zoom and also you should make sure that you know how to use Zoom. At the beginning of class, do some housekeeping and part of that housekeeping is letting them know when they can jump in as part of a conversation. How they should do it. There's mechanisms for raising their hand. There's also a chat feature off to the side that students can add comments. You may use that as a teaching tool where you reach out to all your students, ask them a question and have them put it into the chat rather than jump in on audio.

Being able to control audio is absolutely critical because you don't want those background noises of dogs barking and kids running around and things like that. Ideally, everyone should be muted except for whoever's speaking at that moment and then if someone else needs to speak they unmute for that period of time and go back to mute when they're done. Zoom is a wonderful tool for Screencasting so if you have a presentation you want to show you can certainly do that on Zoom. It has a whiteboard that takes a little bit more energy. If you have a drawing tablet you can certainly use the whiteboard. Here is also something that's important. If you have somebody who is-- has a hearing challenge and you have a presentation that you're giving, one of the things I recommend is turning on or using Google Slides for your presentation instead of PowerPoint.

Go to Google Slides and there is a live captioning feature. When you click on that live captioning, as you're speaking the words will come out in live captioning. It's not perfect but it's really good and I definitely would recommend that. You can conduct your classes in Zoom and do it synchronous. Another option is, pre-recorded your lectures. There's all kinds of different ways that you can pre-record your lectures. There's all kinds of different tools that you can use. Go Videos, Screencastify, and Screencast-O-Matic. One way that I just recently wrote some instructions around was doing PowerPoint voiceovers to video. Then I would upload the video to Youtube and then post it into my class.

For me, that's a very elegant solution, and it's one I will recommend and I'll put it into the show notes. One thing that I would like to encourage you is to keep your videos short but you're thinking to yourself, "Well, they're supposed to be in my class for an hour and a half." I'm just going to tell you nobody's going to listen to your hour and a half presentation. Being in a class is different but if you create a video that's an hour and a half, if you're name is not Spielberg then they're probably not going to watch it. Think about your own behavior. If you get online to look at a Youtube video what's the first thing that you do? You look at how much time it is and you decide if you want to watch that video or not. I recommend a strategy called thin-slicing. This idea of thin-slicing is really just focused on one objective at a time. I was talking to some nursing instructors the other day, and we were talking about this same issue and they had a presentation dealing with respiratory illnesses. Well, each illness could be its own video, but they may have been a class covered five or six different illnesses. By breaking them up into smaller segments, odds are students will actually watch them, but two is you can then reuse them later.

One of the benefits I see coming out of this whole exercise is that you will build a collection of resources that you can use in future classes if you do it right. Rather than tell somebody to go into a video and go 23 minutes into the video and then look at it, you could actually have that chunk of information brought out. Definitely, pre-recording your lectures is a great way but please keep them short.

Set-up discussion, I use a format called IRA discussion, it's insights, resources application, and I'll share that into the show notes. That has been very successful for me and having online discussions. You give students mount to read or watch, and then use that format for discussion, and you will have some pretty lively, interesting discussions going on. Other strategies, office hours. You don't have to give up office

hours, you can use Zoom to do your office hours. I have put a link in the show notes dealing with office hours, the way that you can use Zoom. It's absolutely a great tool.

I would recommend doing virtual office hours even if you had face-to-face office hours. Definitely something that you can put in there. Student presentations. Some of the same strategies for you to create pre-recorded presentations also works for students, but students can also do their presentations through Zoom. With that chat feature on the side, I think you got some powerful stuff going on. Those are some things that I want you to consider as you're moving online.

A couple tips, stay human in the course. They want to see instructor presence. Do not turn this into a correspondence course. Sean Michael Morris, who is a senior instructor in designing or Learning Design and Technology at the University of Colorado, he said when it comes to online education, teach through the screen, not to the screen. I wholeheartedly agree that the instructor needs to be present. You need to be part of these discussions; you need to be part of everything that's going on.

When you are in a face-to-face class, you are sharing of yourself. You let students know you're past experience. Well online, you can do the same thing, and you should be doing the same thing. As I mentioned before, stay flexible. If something is not working, pivot, cut your losses. I would encourage you that something may not go perfect the first time, that doesn't mean throw it all out because it wasn't perfect. Just make some modifications to make it better.

In other cases, it just may have flopped, and that's okay, make the pivot. All right, here are some of my final thoughts. First of all, we as an institution, as an academy are going to come out of this stronger. Everybody will learn something new; they will be able to actually tie back into their face-to-face classes. Everybody will gain an appreciation for this online modality. I honestly believe that we're going to come out of this stronger, and I do believe that what we do, the resources we build will help support face-to-face classrooms.

In spite of the circumstances, I'm a huge fan of this exercise, but I would also like to caution that this is not online instruction. This is a temporary solution in order for us to get to the end of the term. To build a truly online course takes more work, it takes more focus and attention to get the right details, but it's a start. I just wish you all the success in doing this, and I would love to hear back from you. Please, leave comments. If you think I'm totally off the mark, let me know.

I have worked with faculty for a long time and I know what they're capable of and I am totally optimistic that this will be successful, but it all starts with putting in the right mindset. This is a challenge we are all facing, it's not our choice. Let's go kick it in the butt and keep on going from there. Before I let you go, hey, I just want to tell you about a book that I have.