OPINION EXCHANGE

Need to move your class online in a hurry? Here's how

What to focus on and where to look for resources.

By Johanna Creswell Báez , Matthea Marquart and Laurel N. Bidwell | MARCH 17, 2020 — 5:50PM

This week, as we prepare to move classes fully online throughout the world (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BsS1-2RQvgONdUviUJq1TbSqMmoBhbXPiwTIr__pRns/edit#gid=1979093867) , educators are being asked to move very quickly. While most colleges and universities have entered the world of online education in one way or another, not every educational institution or instructor has already done this, which places many educators in the position of having to learn a new mode of instruction quickly and while under stress from the pandemic (https://time.com/5791661/who-coronavirus-pandemic-declaration/) of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). We have been inspired to see educators around the world coming together to support one another and do their best for their students during this challenging time, and as experienced online educators, we offer our advice.

For those who are new to virtual classrooms, we encourage you to start with understanding and learning about the technology available, and preparing yourself, your students and your classrooms.

Before you begin, assess whether all of your students will have access to technology and the internet from home. Many students (even fully online students) still rely upon public or university-based resources and spaces to engage in their education. Perhaps the institution can purchase hot spots that can be checked out, along with laptops or mobile devices.

If you still have in-person time with your students, prepare them for what to expect. Attend to keeping them calm and letting them know where they can access important information and how communication will be handled. If possible, allow students time in class to practice interacting with the technology that you plan to use online.

As you prepare for your own use of technology, focus on your audio, video and how to show your students your slides or other materials. The audio will be most important, as students need to be able to hear you clearly. For students with hearing disabilities or students who have a different primary language than you do, you might need to consider automatic captioning (https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6373554?hl=en) , such as YouTube automatic captioning for prerecorded videos, which you can edit to meet requirements for accuracy. For your audio, best practices state that you will need to be in a quiet space and ideally use a headset with microphone. For your video, you can use a built-in webcam or for better quality can buy an external webcam that plugs into your computer. For sharing your computer screen and presenting slides, think about ways you can practice this with your institutional support, a colleague or even your family, and consider contingency plans, such as e-mailing your slides to your students or posting them in your course site.

To stay connected with your students, we recommend considering ways to meet with your class live and ways to communicate through e-mail or the use of learning management systems. You probably already have access to technology through your institution, such as Zoom or Google Hangouts, and your learning management system likely offers tools such as setting up tests online.

Look to models that have been proven effective. For instance, Columbia University School of Social Work's one-page overview (https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/d8-rbs2-aj56) of quick tips for teaching online covers the basics. There is a vast amount of online scholarly work out there, but we are aware that not many are going to have the luxury of time to explore
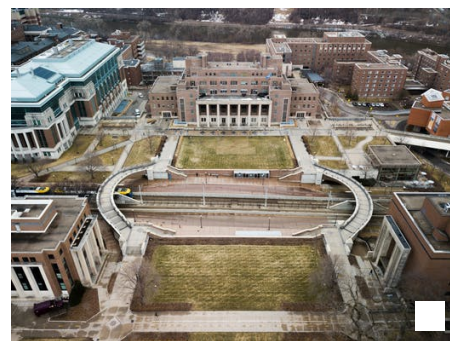
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The University of Minnesota campus was already uncharacteristically absent of students after classes were canceled March 16 and 17.

these articles (https://scholar.google.com/scholar?
hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C44&q=%22Teaching+Online+Courses%22&btnG=) and books, or
even have time to attend the trainings that are being provided by your institution.

Once you're comfortable with the basics, there are many best practices to explore and
apply such as: ways to promote online engagement (https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1204379) ,
build online community
(http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/3985/5270) , create frequent and
purposeful interactions
(https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8B28108) with students to
support connection, use trauma-informed teaching and learning principles
(https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/d8-4fh7-zm92) , and apply
Universal Design for Learning
(https://community.canvaslms.com/groups/designers/blog/2017/10/16/implementing-
universal-design-for-learning-on-canvas) principles to support accessibility, among
others. You may even want to start weekly online meetings with fellow faculty members
to share tips, activities and challenges that you've come across as you engage in online
teaching and learning.

We applaud the efforts of educators who are doing their best for students under stressful
circumstances, and we hope these tips will help.

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