

Reflections from the Remote Classroom

Musings about and suggestions for finishing the spring semester

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Our core principles sustain and guide us

Andrea Follmer Greenhoot, CTE/Psychology

None of us could have felt truly prepared for this unprecedented disruption to teaching, learning, and normal life. Even those of us with experience in online teaching have been grappling to retrofit in-person courses to remote instruction, while being mindful of the challenges and stresses faced by our students. I have twice adjusted the plan for my own course on child development, originally organized around team-based in-class learning activities, and I still see several areas that need improvement.

For many of our colleagues, the challenges are amplified by teaching subjects that are not readily translated into an online environment, or increased stress and responsibilities at home. Last week Joshua Hartshorne, a faculty member at Boston College, shared with the Cognitive Development Society listserv some results from his ongoing survey of American parents during COVID: 56% of respondents reported five or more additional hours of caregiving per day, with 82% of it happening when the parent would normally be working.

Faculty who teach labs, studios, practicums, and field-based work in hands-on disciplines have faced particularly difficult challenges. Yet I am inspired by the creativity, fortitude, and compassion for students that I have seen in so many KU instructors during this crisis.

The specifics of the fall teaching landscape are still uncertain, but we do know that we are going to have to build adaptability into our teaching if we are to thrive in the future. This will involve a flexible model of teaching that can be shifted between different teaching contexts and is focused on improving student learning. It also must demonstrate the value of a research university education and what sets KU apart from other universities. This may sound like a daunting task, but KU has many assets that will help us rise to the challenge. Chief among those is a community of instructors who are already devoted to exploring and implementing high quality educational practices to improve student learning, and a history of investing in educational improvement to adapt to the rapidly changing ecosystem of higher education. At the core of any future approach is one that will be familiar to many of us: articulate goals for student learning, create opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of those goals, and use tools and strategies available in the current teaching context to create learning experiences that will help students reach the goals.

The Faculty Consultant Network for Remote Teaching is an outgrowth of this foundation. The Network is comprised of faculty from a wide range of disciplines who have made themselves available to help their faculty and graduate student colleagues adjust to remote instruction, along with leaders from CTE, CODL, and KU IT who have been supporting the transition centrally. We have convened the network weekly to share what we are learning through our teaching and our work with colleagues, to engage in collaborative problem solving, and to work towards a shared vision of how to support KU instructors for what comes next, after the dust settles on Spring 2020. In the rest of this special edition of our newsletter, members of the network reflect on their strategies for coping with remote teaching, working, and life this spring.



Remote teaching diary

Doug Ward, CTE/Journalism & Mass Communication

13 days until isolation. A carefully planned list of 1,368 VERY IMPORTANT THINGS to do during spring break dissolves before my eyes as I am enlisted to help create a website on remote teaching. In the CTE conference room, a dozen people stare at laptop computers. Half-a-dozen others peer out like the Brady Bunch from a videoconference screen running Zoom. I fear this is a premonition.

Two days until isolation. At my last physical meeting on campus, I glance at my feet and realize I am wearing two different kinds of boots. A colleague snickers. Then everyone snickers. "We're not really laughing at you," she says. "It's just ..." I try to look at the bright side. At least I put my boots on the right feet.



One day until isolation. I spend an hour digging through drawers and cabinets for anything I might need for working at home. I leave the office with a backpack strapped to my back, three large bags dangling from my hands and a whiteboard tucked beneath my arm. I can't shake the feeling that I have forgotten something. My phone! Six feet behind me, the office door slams shut.



Isolation Day 1. A fog settled over Lawrence during the night. A perfect setting for the first day of remote classes. A bright spot: Candy Crush announces unlimited lives all week long.

Isolation Day 3. Laptop in lap, I sit in my living room and join a Zoom meeting. On screen, a colleague lounges on a tropical beach at an undisclosed location. Oh, wait. That's just a fake background. He probably just did that to get attention. I roll my eyes.

Isolation Day 4. I scour the web for a picture of the Tardis, the police call box that the Doctor uses to traverse time and space in Doctor Who. During a time of social isolation, economic turmoil and general uncertainty, I can go anywhere and any time. Such symbolism! I set the image of the Tardis as my background in Zoom.

Isolation Day 5. "You'll have to tell us what that background is," a colleague says at the beginning of a Zoom meeting. Inside, part of me dies.

Isolation Day 6. I change my Zoom background to the bridge of the Starship Enterprise.

Isolation Day 7. I need to get groceries. I fashion a mask from a blue bandana. Then I put pull my leather outback hat down low. I giggle. I tell my wife I look like I'm getting ready to rob a stagecoach. My wife rolls her eyes. I shrug and change to a red ballcap. At the grocery store, everyone stays back well more than six feet.

Isolation Day 10. I gleefully plug in a smart speaker in the excavated spare bedroom I have turned into a work area. My wife unplugged the speaker in the main part of the house months ago because she thought I was always talking to myself. Now I can ask it anything. Anything! I think long and hard. "Hey, Cortana. What's the weather?" Like I really need to know.



continued

Isolation Day 11. I set up the portable whiteboard I retrieved from my office and scrawl a list of VERY IMPORTANT THINGS in green marker. Then I brace for ultra-productivity. I envision a self-help book about VERY IMPORTANT THINGS and a tour as a motivational speaker. "How do you do it?" people will ask. I will simply hold up a green marker and say ... Oh, no. Does it say PERMANENT?

Isolation Day 12. After six hours of Zoom meetings, my laptop has itself glued to my lap, the headset has fused to my ears, my eyeballs hang limp, and I feel as if I have traveled into another dimension. I change my Zoom background to a glacier lagoon from Iceland and head to the refrigerator for a beer. A puddle has appeared in front of the refrigerator. Either it needs to be defrosted or it has developed incontinence. Note to self: Ask Cortana.

Isolation Day 13. Students mention feeling disconnected from their classes. I feel disconnected from the students. So I set up office hours on Zoom. No one shows up. Note to self: Remote teaching is exactly like in-person teaching.

Isolation Day 19. During a webinar, the chancellor says that more than 90% of KU employees are now working remotely. He says this while wearing a suit and tie. Does he really wear a suit and tie while he works from home? I've worn the same shirt for four days.

Isolation Day 20. During a meeting, I realize that Zoom spelled backward is *mooZ*. The meeting suddenly takes on a new meaning.

Isolation Day 21. Bzzzzzz. My Fitbit (bzzzzzzz) taunts me. Bzzzzzz. Time to get up and move, it says on the screen. It shows a perky stick figure stretching and leaping. "OK, where am I supposed to go?" I snarl. Cortana blinks blue. "I'm sorry. I'm afraid I didn't catch that."

Isolation Day 25. I read that anxiety from being shut in during the coronavirus can affect mood, work habits, even concentration. I'm not sure I b

Isolation Day 26. If I multiply the number of minutes I spend in Zoom meetings by the number of meeting participants, it equals the number of new email messages I receive during those calls.

$$Zm \times Zp = \infty$$

I think I'm on to something big.

Isolation Day 30. I have now logged more than 80 hours of Zoom meetings since seclusion began. I change my Zoom background back to the Tardis. Then I write "Change Zoom background" in green on the taunting whiteboard. Then I cross it out. For the first time in a month, I feel a sense of accomplishment.



TECH TIPS FROM IT AND CODL

Issues with Blackboard Force Completion

When deploying a Blackboard test, **we recommend turning Force Completion off.** The setting is designed to assist with test integrity for in-person proctored exams by auto-submitting students' tests if they leave the browser session. While testing remotely, it can unintentionally submit attempts for various reasons including poor internet connection, creating problems for students and instructors. Because all students are taking tests remotely, we recommend using a Timer and the Auto-Submit function, instead of Force Completion, to ensure that students submit all test attempts within the desired time frame.

Audio/Video Feedback Grading in Blackboard

It is now possible to give audio/video feedback to students when grading in Blackboard. Instructors will need to use the Chrome or Firefox browser in order to use this function. Look for the microphone icon in any *Feedback to Learner* textbox toolbar.

Learn more about where to find the feature, how to use it, and answers to common questions at Blackboard's webpage: https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Audio_Video_Recording.

Reflections from Faculty Consultants

The Faculty Consultant Network was developed by CTE this spring. It is comprised of KU faculty members with expertise in online teaching and digital tools. Since spring break, network members have served as discipline-based peer consultants, supporting instructors and helping build community in their units and in related fields. Below are their answers to questions about remote teaching.



How are you maintaining connections with your students?



Susan Marshall, Psychology

I really miss my students and the conversations about life that happen around and during class time. To try to re-establish some of those non-coursework related connections, I started a GroupMe for each of my classes and invited students to join. I share pictures of what I'm doing in my everyday work-at-home life—pictures of my dog/office assistant, sights from neighborhood walks, spring returning to Kansas, etc. We all recently shared pictures of our to-do lists and ways that we're trying to stay organized. It's been nice to see the new normal for all of us and reconnect as humans!



John Brickley, Engineering & Project Management/Edwards

I am making sure that I provide feedback on assignments very promptly, and I am trying to answer student emails within no more than a few hours of receiving them. I am also an Ed.D. student, so it has been a bit insane trying to keep up with everything. Between grading, preparing for the summer semester, and doing homework that I have to turn in, I don't have much time for anything else. However, one of my professors is hosting a weekly one hour "office hours" session, but it is more of an opportunity for us just to get together and have some time to talk. It has been beneficial.

TECH TIPS FROM IT AND CODL

Discussion Board Grading

Discussion board grading can be laborious if you don't know the shortcuts. If you set a discussion board to grading, it will automatically collect all the posts an individual has created. This enables you to see all their work in one place and assign a grade for that work. Once the grade is submitted, Blackboard will move to the next student who has posts to grade in that discussion forum. You can get to the grading area three ways:

- If you set the forum to grading BEFORE students submit work, all student submissions for the discussion board will appear in the Needs Grading area (found under the expanded Full Grade Center link).
- The second option to access grading is to enter the forum. You should see a blue button called Grade Discussion.
- The third option is to go to the discussion board, choose the pull down menu and select Grade.



Nancy Jo Kepple, Social Welfare

I already have twice monthly contact with BSW students, so I have shifted contact to a mix of text check-ins, establishing a GroupMe for the group, and scheduling 1:1 Zoom meetings. The master's students are often in roles considered "essential," and they are older with families; I have had to balance providing opportunities to engage and being mindful of increased responsibilities. My solution was to move my blended course to become asynchronous, and set up different ways engage with them (virtual office hours, feedback forms, structured assignments, e-mail check-ins). My PhD students have required more regular 1:1 Zoom meetings to problem-solve around data collection needs and individualized projects that are appropriate for their stage of learning.



How are you balancing life in quarantine with teaching?

Lisa Sharpe Elles, Chemistry

I am maintaining a balance (if you can call it that) between work and kids by involving them in some science demos and lab videos for my students. We have done a few experiments and recorded them for my classes and shared them with their classmates on Facebook and Seesaw. So far we have explored gas laws by doing the egg in a bottle trick and chemical reactions and acid base chemistry by making alka-seltzer rockets and having a balloon race. The kids also helped me with my chemistry lab videos about carbohydrate chemistry (making peanut brittle) and protein denaturation (making cheese). Hopefully the students appreciate seeing the fun side of science and share these experiments, as well as what they have learned, with their family and friends.



Sean Seyer, Humanities

It is easy for me to lose perspective. As of this writing, over 60,000 Americans have died of this virus and over 30 million have filed for unemployment. While I did not give my permission for this pandemic, I have not contracted Covid-19, and I am fortunate to be in a profession where I can work from home. This privileged position brings with it a responsibility to give back however I can, be it through donating to local causes (<https://justfoodks.org/donate/>), providing students with a high level of flexibility and understanding, or checking in on colleagues, friends, and family.

Now that I spend so much time in front of a monitor, I find something uniquely refreshing about a depth of field. After staring at a computer screen all day, the last thing I want to do is stare at a television screen. Increasingly living in digital space has increased my desire to engage with the physical world, and this has manifested itself in a renewed interest in the hobby of miniature modeling and painting. Perhaps this quarantine is a good time to try your hand at a new hobby, or to reacquaint yourself with a past (non-digital) pastime? (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_hobbies)



Are you learning anything that might change the way you teach in the future?

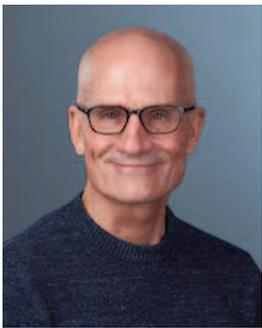
Shannon Criss, Architecture

I've been impressed with how my design students are developing their daily submissions in our MWF course. What I like is that:

1. They are able to a) develop their work as they need to (scanned hand-sketches, photographs of physical models and/or digital drawings and models of their work), b) collect all of the work into individual images, c) assemble as a PDF presentation and d) create a voice-over slide-show through ZOOM (super easy!)
2. They asynchronously develop these and post the evening before class. Then, their peers (3-4 students per team) review the presentation prior to their group-class-time the next day. This allows them to do this a) at a time that best works with them; b) come to class with comments about others work (flipped) so that they can come to class for discussion and feedback; c) while they work individually, they are able to learn from others and apply approaches/concepts to their own work. I'm finding this process is comfortable for them, and they are practicing their critical thinking skills and their abilities to visually and orally communicate their ideas. It is great practice, and there's a nice record of their progress that we can easily refer back to and discuss later.
3. Following up, I can develop voice overs of their PDF slideshows, providing them with feedback. I also take screenshots of their drawings, print and then do trace overlay drawings that provide them with feedback. It's been a most interesting, adaptive process. There are certainly challenges, and it takes twice as long to teach as it does doing this live. However, there are some benefits that I'm considering in the New Normal.



David Johnson, EECS



The thing I will probably change in the future is on-line exams. Some background: First, I firmly believe in open-book, open-note exams. Second, I believe students should be able to use phones, laptops, or tablets to access information for two reasons:

- I teach Electrical Engineering, Computer Engineering, and Computer Science students. Not allowing them to use the very tools that are created by these disciplines seems rather insane to me.
- These are the tools they will have when they join the workforce. And that is what I am training them for: to be in the workforce.

Third, I believe in publishing exam answers. Given all that, it is hard to prevent cheating even with proctored exams. But, I am willing to put up with it because I believe so strongly in on-line, accessible, open-book, open-note exams and giving students the exam answers after it is over.

What I discovered using Blackboard to administer on-line exams during this time of remote teaching is that Blackboard's ability to randomly present questions and answers and use answer pools goes a long way toward preventing cheating in an on-line, accessible, open-book, open-note exam. I don't have to worry about consistency in grading, because I employ graders and GTAs to grade my exams. Blackboard is very consistent, as you would expect of a computer. So, I will probably continue to use it. Then I can spend my time making up new questions for the pools at exam time, instead of tweaking previous questions.



Amy Leyerzapf, Leadership Studies

After launching both online synchronous course meetings and virtual office hours, one carryover from this “brave new world” style semester I may keep using is virtual office hours. Prior to our online transition, students rarely requested time during office hours; most just visited with me after class. While I still have several after class questions now that we are online, a number of students are also popping into my weekly Zoom office hours for consultations on assignments, as well as just wanting to talk. I’m hopeful that this will continue, because it has provided an opportunity to get to know my students better, and we are seeing an improvement in assignment scores.

Laura Diede, Center for Online and Distance Learning

In CODL we’ve always said there is no one-size-fits-all solution to translating in-person content to online. We also know there is a difference between best practices and best-for-you practices. Through recent conversations with faculty I have learned that sometimes best-for-you practices can evolve into best practices, which can be applied to many different scenarios. It turns “you shouldn’t” into “you could.” Though the rapid transition to remote teaching has been stressful, I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from colleagues and to view pedagogy through an alternative lens. I will be able to apply the lessons I’ve learned to the way I support KU teaching in the future.

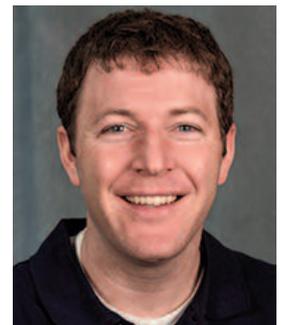


Carolyn Huffman, Undergraduate Biology

Since the quarantine, I have been attending conference calls (for a professional society that I belong to) that have been discussing online teaching and learning. Hearing how other teachers across the US are adapting their courses has provided new resources to me. I have been able to share some of these with my colleagues in Undergraduate Biology and sharpen my own online classes in innovative ways. If you belong to a professional organization, tap into their knowledge base for teaching resources in your specific field that have been tried already and worked well for others.

Robert Tonnies, Information Technology

A significant realization for me during this transition has been KU’s capacity to adapt. I had many doubts about all of campus moving to remote teaching, about our services like Blackboard and Kaltura being able to support an eight-fold increase, and about our support resources ability to assist the demand. On all fronts, KU and the people who are KU have adapted. This has left me with a different perception of KU’s ability pivot, grow, and change to meet the demands of any new situation. I have a constantly renewed optimism for our collective ability to meet the challenges in view.



Center for Teaching Excellence

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