





# ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

## The New Normal (For a While)

by Lisa Gibbs, Ed.D.

As a result of the highly contagious and novel coronavirus, COVID-19, colleges and universities have been forced to move all classes to an online format. This event has presented challenges to both the students and the faculty. Until now, a majority of instruction was given in a face-to-face manner—lecture hall, classroom, dance or art studio, theatre, science lab or technology lab—where interpersonal interaction could easily take place. Today, online teaching and learning is the new normal, at least for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

## Not Much Preparation for This New Reality

Online learning platforms are not new. In 1995, CALCampus “was the first implementation of a totally online-based school through which administration, real-time classroom instruction, and materials were provided.” According to 2007 data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 75% of distance learning courses were offered online, resulting in the terms “distance learning” and “online learning” becoming synonymous.

NCES data from 2017 shows the number of students enrolled in distance education courses at public, private non-profit, and private for-profit institutions. Of the total responding private non-profit institutions, there were 4,106,477 enrolled students.

Of those students, 71.3 percent were not enrolled in any distance education courses. Of the remaining students, 9.5 % were enrolled in at least one course, with 19.2% enrolled in exclusively distance education courses.

## A Swift (Too-Swift) Adaptation

In the blink of an eye, in March 2020, all private college and university students in the US are enrolled in online courses. Students and faculty are attempting to swiftly adapt to virtual learning no matter the subject.

Most, if not all, institutions have extended regular spring break from one week to two weeks in order for faculty to have time to adjust their teaching method, and for students to move off campus, if possible, until the end of the school year.

Numerous colleges and universities have the infrastructure to move quickly from in-person to online courses because they’ve already planned for emergencies. Blizzards, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, even student absences have been addressed by many Information Technology departments in the US and across the world.

New York University (NYU) maintains campuses in several US cities as well as Shanghai and Abu Dhabi. NYU Shanghai moved to online learning on February 17 and NYU Abu Dhabi moved online March 8. At

NYU in New York City, on March 16 all classes moved online. Technologies such as NYU Stream (video content creation, sharing and storage) and NYU Drive (document creation, sharing and storage) were already available and being utilized by faculty and students.

## Universities Work Together to Share Best Practices

The university provides a link specifically for faculty on its Coronavirus Information page. Within this page is a link to the Remote Instruction Support page developed by the IT department. This faculty resource was designed for events such as snow days or emergencies in order to “connect with students remotely and deliver course materials”.

Quick start guides and specific tools for specific tasks are listed, as well as links to best practices, academic integrity, and accessibility. Beginning March 23, interactive one-hour webinars are provided to help faculty learn how to use Zoom for online teaching.

At the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, in-person classes were suspended

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on March 12. The Office of Information Technology has a webpage titled “Teaching in Crisis”, designed to provide faculty with “resources to assist you in making your course content accessible from anywhere, anytime.”

A self-paced course offering strategies for effective instructional design and best practices is offered free for faculty members. A video series called “Bits of Knowledge: When to Use What” is embedded on the Get Started page. This short video overviews Voice Over PowerPoints, Video Recorded Sessions, live sessions using WebEx, and how to use Moodle for online coursework.

The page features links to topics including working from home, resources for the learner, accessibility for differently-abled students, best practices, and tools supported by AUB’s IT department. The site also includes suggestions for online assessment practices.

### Checklists to Determine, and Improve, Readiness

The Department of Information Technology at Lewis and Clark College (Portland, OR) acknowledged “a variety of circumstances



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might require a quick shift for a specific student to participate remotely or to take an entire class online for a period of time with little notice.”

A checklist is provided to help faculty determine their readiness to move to online instruction, including communication channels, accessibility, and how to conduct an online class. Information on platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, Google Classroom, and Moodle, along with links to those resources are provided. Faculty are encouraged to provide information addressing emergencies and possible cancellations in their syllabi each semester.

Pepperdine University (Malibu, CA) suspended in-person classes on March 13. In a March 11 campus news release, the university stated “faculty have been preparing for some time

for this possible outcome and, having learned from our efforts during the Woolsey Fire, they will provide highly effective instruction via a remote alternative instruction format.”

An academic continuity plan for teaching and learning was put in place as a proactive response to extreme weather, natural disasters, or other unexpected events.

### Resources and Support for Faculty

Tools and resources for faculty include best practices, communication, course materials, and assessment. Zoom, Google Meet, Courses Chat, and Google Chat are suggested platforms to replace in-person class discussions with synchronous online discussions. Numerous online training sessions for faculty are scheduled

for March 23 – 27, with plans for more sessions as needed.

The speed of technology seems faster than the speed of light now that all US college and university instruction is to be delivered online. However, two weeks may feel like a very short time to adapt curriculum from in-person to online.

Faculty who are unaccustomed to distance learning are given many resources by their colleges and universities, and a learning curve is to be expected. Continuous communication and support by higher education leadership will be extremely important as these unpredicted adjustments are made.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** PUPN staff writer Lisa Gibbs earned her Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration in 2018. She is an advocate for arts, particularly dance, in education and for increasing the financial well-being of artists through financial education.

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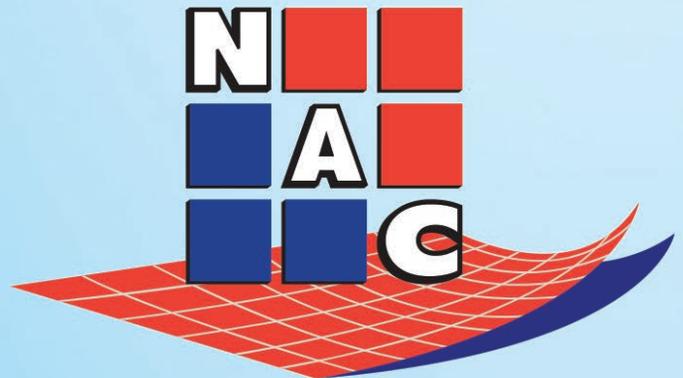
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