

Pandemic Dispatches #6

Is it May Yet? (IT IS!); Looking Toward the Future; Reflecting on the Move to Remote Instruction

Oh Hey, It's May!

It's May! I am excited about this! Even with physical distancing and no real vacation likely in the cards for this summer, I am pleased to report that I am writing this in full view of the sun, with my plants happy in their windowsills and in my half open garden room (if only the weather would stay warm!). For many of us, May brings closure. We will finish what will likely be known as the asterisk semester for many of us, the semester where everything changed and we did what we could to keep up, to stay healthy and remain engaged, all while dealing with a lot of what ifs and unknowns. May will also usher in the end of a stressful period for many of our students. One of the things I will be doing is sending a personalized message to each class, letting them know how proud of them I am, how they rose to an unprecedented (in my history) challenge, and let them know that I appreciate them, along with the patience and camaraderie they have shown the last few months. I will also take a few breaths in the sunshine, fully masked, and be thankful for these simple moments.

Looking Toward the Future of The Institution

We are a college that is funded by enrollments. We are in a position where we may lose a significant number of students for reasons beyond our control as an institution. Professional Development Facilitator Stephanie Malmberg offers up her advice to students and adults wondering if right now is a good time to be in school. You can read that article here:

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-now-time-go-back-school-stephanie-malmberg-ph-d-/>

Reflecting on the Move to Remote Instruction

I have personally found a lot of value in the conversations offered by Beckie Supiano of The Chronicle of Higher Education. This entry describes what many of us went through in the move to remote instruction and offers some food for thought as to what we are trying to accomplish in this format. Below is one of her latest offerings on what it is we did and how

we can move from translating our on-ground courses to adapting what we do for distance teaching and learning.

Not Translation. Adaptation.

By Beckie Supiano, The Chronicle of Higher Education

When colleges shut down in-person classes this spring, many instructors took pains to say that what was offered instead was *not* online learning. Other terms have been offered up — emergency online teaching, remote instruction — though probably none is quite right.

The distinction between online learning and the scrambling to adjust courses midstream was initially pushed by instructors and experts who know that well-designed online courses and programs are effective. They were worried that students' and professors' experiences this semester would give online learning a bad name.

But maybe the distinction also mattered to professors who never imagined they would teach online. Perhaps that's why some of them tried so hard to replicate their existing course in synchronous video conferences, despite the many arguments against this format from online-teaching experts.

I've been thinking about this more since I interviewed Robin DeRosa, who directs the Open Learning & Teaching Collaborative at Plymouth State University, for my recent article about Zoom fatigue. DeRosa, who is also a professor of interdisciplinary studies, described some of the online tools she favors in her own teaching — tools that let her connect with students differently than they could face-to-face. For instance, she uses an app called Hypothesis, which lets people socially annotate a text.

Even Zoom, which so many professors are already teaching with, could be used to do more than gather the class in one online place, DeRosa says. In class discussions of a text, for instance, she has included its author on the platform.

This would be a great time, she says, “for professors from different institutions to start putting their classes in conversation with each other, because we're all online anyway, and we have to use these tools.”

Instead, DeRosa says, many professors have mostly tried to replicate what they were doing face-to-face.

Maybe creating an online version of a course is like adapting a book for film, I suggested. It's not about dutifully capturing every word on the page, and it works best when the movie version takes advantage of things that books can't do.

DeRosa said she liked the analogy — but that she understands why professors working in a crisis see their task as translating a course, not adapting it.

Still, she said, “what we'd really like to see is for faculty to really understand the choices they have, and to make those choices in an informed way, so that we can use the benefits of the internet, but also so that we don't just do what we've done before many times in learning, which is let the most powerful companies, with the most available technology and the best sales pitches, decide for us what learning looks like.”

That's food for thought as colleges lay plans for the fall.