The Big COVID-19 Switch

Remote Learning

I first want to stress the main difference between “remote” and “online” learning. Online learning is an entire way of teaching; it requires technical knowledge and expertise. As of Monday, March 23, we are doing remote learning, which is limited to communicating with students, delivering content to them, and assessing their work. Remote learning is a time-limited, stopgap measure.

I advocate for simple, practical solutions. Lean on what you already know, including Google Suite, Moodle, and basic email. I would strongly discourage trying to learn complex systems that require a high learning curve (like new platforms, fancy apps, etc.), especially given the lack of expert training and time. Here are a few considerations when planning your switch:

Asynchronous Learning

The first thing to determine is whether you will maintain you class time or not. Synchronous learning, which is what we do when we all meet in a classroom at a predetermined time, can seem like a good idea, but I would like you to consider the following implications:

• Once students are away from campus, they are no longer just “students.” They become someone’s child, someone’s caretaker, etc.
• Student-workers are no longer receiving their income; many will resume their local jobs to compensate.
• Not everyone, including yourself, might have access to high-speed internet, a computer with a webcam, or even a reliable network.
• If you have dependents, you might find yourself in a situation where your regular schedule is unsustainable.

What to do? Go for asynchronous learning instead.

• Consider remote, asynchronous learning as similar to an independent study. This model enables students and teachers to manage their time with more flexibility.
• On Monday morning, share with your students the assignment, research/discussion questions, or activities you want them to complete by, say, Sunday night.
• Offer to maintain class schedule for consultations.

This is a highly unusual circumstance that requires all of us to adapt in some way. This adaptation might come easily to some while it might seem like an ordeal to others. The idea is to minimize workload and anxiety while meeting student learning objectives and learning goals.

You will find a few simple shifts for common activities in the following page.
Simple Shifts for Various Activities

Ask yourself what your comfort level with technology is, and which platforms you (normally) use. Be realistic! Here are a few simple recommendations for class activities:

- **Lecture**
  - Record yourself using Zoom or Youtube (advanced, high prep).
  - Distribute notes and slides in advance on Moodle, via Google doc, or simple email.
  - TIP: If using slides, consider adding notes to the “comment” section on the slides.

- **Class participation, discussion, & group work**
  - Moodle chat rooms on a specific topic (Add an activity> Chat)
  - Moodle forums
  - Google doc (e.g.: in a class of 30 students, create 6 Google docs with a few questions for discussion and send one link to 5 students, forming a “small group of 5”. Ask students to discuss the questions using the Google doc)
  - TIP: consider assigning a multi-part/question or short essay instead of discussion

- **Graded essays & feedback**
  - Moodle (Add an activity> Assignments)
  - Google Docs

- **Quizzes**
  - Moodle (Add an activity> quiz)
  - TIP: Consider making quizzes/exams “open book”/short essay style

- **Presentations**
  - Zoom and Google Hangouts can be a good option
  - TIP: Consider making presentations optional

- **Screenings**
  - Moodle (if not available on Youtube or other streaming service). (Add an activity> External Tool> UMass Libraries Course Materials> & request streaming) *This one is tricky, please use this link & follow the instructions: [https://www.umass.edu/it/support/moodle/givestudentsaccesslibrarycoursemateri alsthroughmoodle](https://www.umass.edu/it/support/moodle/givestudentsaccesslibrarycoursemateri alsthroughmoodle)

- **Office hours**
  - TIP: Consider using your class time as office hours. Email, Moodle chat, Google Hangouts, or even your phone number are good options.

These solutions are not perfect, but they are achievable, given the limitations we currently face in time, technical expertise, and planning logistics.