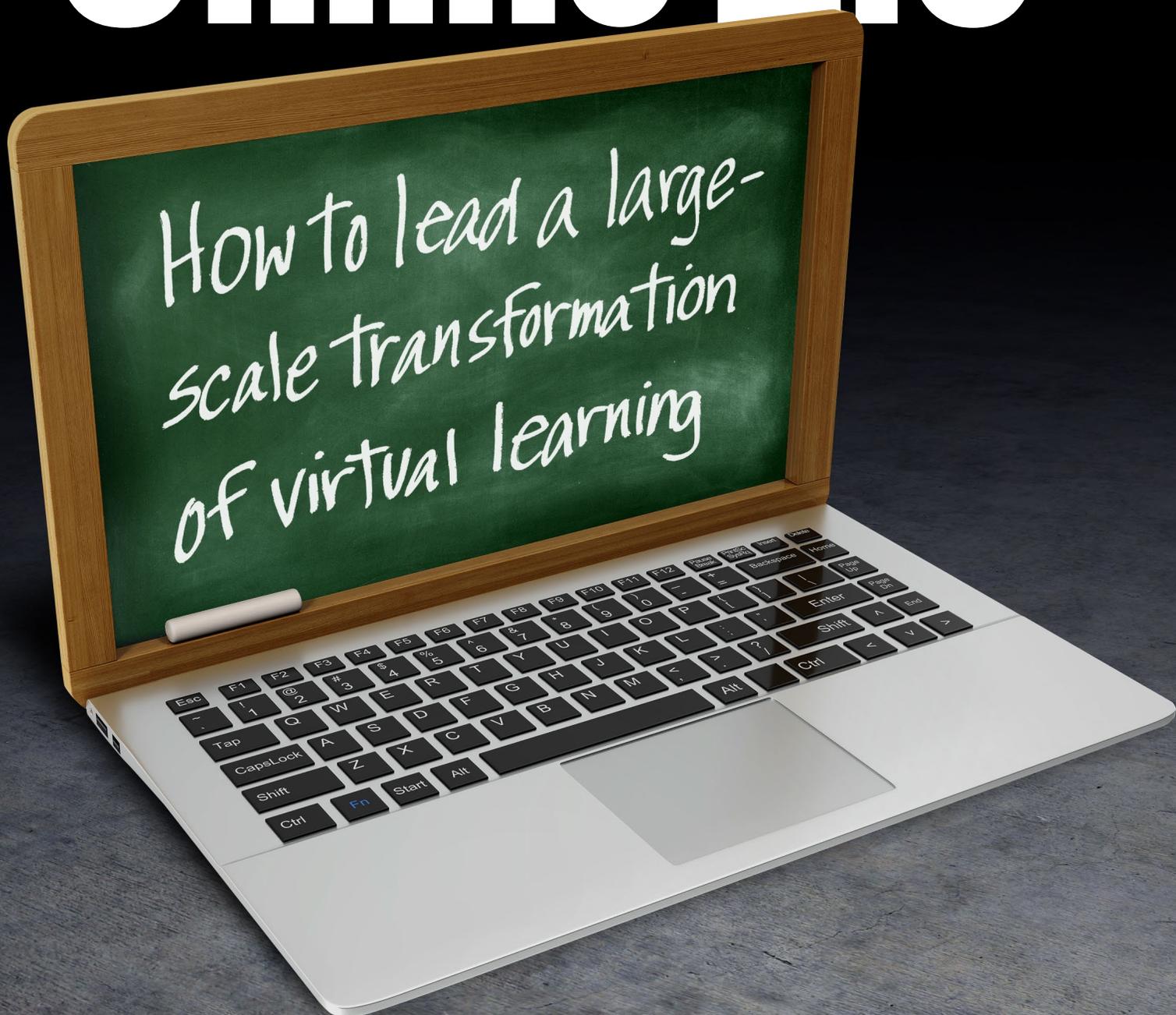


THE CHRONICLE  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION®

# Online 2.0



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## SECTION 1



# Preparing for a Different Kind of Classroom

By BETH MCMURTRIE

**T**his spring the University of South Florida, a sprawling campus on the outskirts of Tampa, undertook the seemingly impossible. It shifted 5,000 courses online in a matter of days, emptied residence halls of more than 6,000 undergraduates, and did its best to ensure that its students, about 40 percent of whom are lower-income, had the laptops and Wi-Fi access they needed to continue learning from home. The system's president, Steven C. Currall, has said his goal is to reopen in the fall, bringing students back to campus, but with "some adjustments."

What those adjustments are remains the multibillion-dollar question, not just for South Florida but for all of higher education. As colleges plan for the next academic year, so much is uncertain, including the continuing threat of Covid-19, the health of campus budgets, and the desire of students to enroll. But institutions across the country know two things for sure: They don't want to remain fully online come late August, yet they must prepare for that possibility. Can they create a fall semester that will persuade millions of students to return to college, convinced they're getting their money's worth?

Higher education was granted a lot of good will during the spring term by students and their families. But as with an unhappy marriage, everyone involved agrees that the patched-together system of awkward Zoom classes, glitchy technology, and uncertain expectations, among both students and professors, needs to end.

Skeptical students and their parents don't seem willing to pay full price for an experience similar to what they lived through this semester. If virtual learning is mandatory this fall, one survey found, two-thirds of students will expect discounts on tuition and fees. Some may avoid enrolling altogether. And many international students are unlikely to be able to return to campus in time for the fall, thanks to a combination of financial worries and logistical hurdles.

Some colleges are seeing early warning signs, with deposits from incoming first-year students significantly lower than last year. Meanwhile, some institutions with robust online education arms, as well as

alternative-education providers, are seeing an uptick in interest. StraighterLine, a company that offers low-cost online general-education courses that students can transfer for credit to 150 partner colleges, saw a 40-percent increase in enrollment of students referred by nonpartner colleges.

For now, several college and university leaders are sounding an optimistic note, with a heavy dose of caveats, about the coming academic year. Currall and other leaders, including Mitch Daniels of Purdue University and Christina H. Paxson of Brown University, have said that vigilant testing of students, faculty, and staff for the coronavirus, social distancing, and a blend of in-person and remote learning could get them through the fall. Rice University announced that it would run a shorter semester, with all classes available both in person and online.

Even that degree of optimistic planning will require some serious rethinking of the undergraduate educational experience, with online learning playing a prominent role. The virus has already prompted some colleges to reimagine the traditional calendar. Now they're considering what the classroom will look like, too. Several options for course delivery are emerging, in three broad categories, each with its own challenges:

- **In person.** Few people envision a return to normal this fall. Instead of lecture halls packed with students, imagine those spaces with fewer students sitting several seats apart or staggered in rows.

## The Chronicle Survey on Online Learning

*The Chronicle* conducted an online survey of faculty members and academic administrators of two- and four-year institutions from May 11 to May 17. Responses came from 935 faculty members of all ranks, from full professor to adjunct, and from 595 academic administrators, whose job titles included provost, dean, and department head, among others. Of these totals, 314 respondents identified themselves as both instructional faculty and academic administrators with some responsibility “for the development, delivery, or evaluation of courses” or for improving teaching. Results from the survey are included throughout this section.

## Taking Stock of Course Quality

Faculty members and administrators agreed that their institutions' online courses in the spring were inferior to what had been offered in person.

■ Moderately worse ■ Much worse ■ Equivalent ■ Superior

### Faculty



### Administrators



Source: Chronicle survey

But colleges would probably have to limit enrollments or scale back course offerings in order to make this model work — unless they ask some students to participate remotely through online versions of the classes.

- **Online.** A high-quality online course is different from the makeshift experience students received this spring. But the process of developing a series of well-designed courses, in which professors are trained in effective online-teaching practices, can take months. And no college has attempted to execute that option on the scale needed now. The California State University system has announced, for example, that it will be moving the majority of classes on its 23 campuses online this fall.
- **Blended or Hybrid.** This version offers the most flexibility, because it allows some students to attend in person and others to study remotely. One version, known as HyFlex, has been getting buzz for its flexibility in allowing students to decide, week by week, which mode they'd prefer. While this could help achieve social-distancing goals and accommodate students who can't be on

campus for health or logistical reasons, it's also complicated to pull off.

“The easiest for faculty members is all face to face or all online,” says Kelly Hogan, associate dean of instructional innovation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who has looked at hybrid models as part of her work to help faculty members prepare to teach online this summer. “Anything in between is hard to plan for.”

Colleges will have to think strategically about how to train their professors to teach more effectively online, redesign course offerings, and decide which experiences absolutely must be done in person and which can be handled remotely.

Such a shift won't be easy. While just about every professor now has some experience with learning-management systems and videoconferencing or other tech tools, relatively few have been trained in effective teaching practices or online-course design. And higher education's siloed approach to online instruction, professional development, and course design can make widespread improvements difficult.

Even as the world becomes increasingly digital, says Angela Gunder, vice president for learning at the Online Learning Consortium, which provides professional

development to faculty members and others involved in designing online coursework, most colleges still treat online education as a thing separate from their core mission. “One group thinks about online. Everybody else thinks about face to face, and never the two shall meet,” she says. “We really need to move away from that.”

### TAKING STOCK

Many colleges are taking steps to offer a better online instructional experience in the summer, and evaluating what worked — and what didn’t — this spring.

Most of the faculty members and academic administrators surveyed by *The Chronicle* agreed that the emergency remote courses this spring were inferior to what had been offered in person previously (See “Taking Stock of Course Quality,” p. 7).

South Florida is offering about 1,400 courses entirely online this summer, instead of providing a combination of online and in-person courses, as it normally does. To convert the more than 500 courses that would usually be offered in person, the university created a scaled-down version of its regular online-course-development program.

South Florida already had a significant online footprint: One-third of students’ credit hours this year were being delivered online, which made the initial pivot this spring a lot easier. And about 30 to 40 percent of the university’s faculty members had been through a five-week online-instructor certification course, enabling them to support their colleagues during the spring transition.

But the university needs to make further investments to prepare for the fall, says Ralph Wilcox, provost and executive vice president. Academic units are considering a range of options to help plan for possible online teaching and reduce the number of people in classrooms. The options include taping lectures and using virtual reality and other technologies to substitute for some in-person lab work. The university also plans to hire more specialists to help train faculty members to teach effectively online, deploy graduate students to support that training, and rethink course schedules

to incorporate social distancing into classrooms and lecture halls, with some students beaming in remotely.

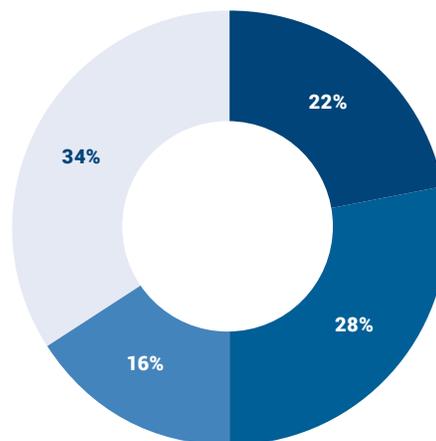
All told, the university will invest more than \$5 million to move summer courses online and make the fall semester more adaptable to online teaching, says Wilcox. That sort of strategic thinking is critical to South Florida’s long-term success. “If we didn’t make this investment and students weren’t provided access to the coursework needed for timely graduation,” he says, “they’d look somewhere else.”

Education experts who have been following higher education’s transition to remote learning say that colleges need to act quickly if they want to be fully prepared for the fall. Van L. Davis, a policy and planning consultant for the Wiche Cooperative for Educational Technologies and other higher-education organizations, is concerned by how few colleges have started that planning. “A lot of schools are still very much reacting to what’s

### Some Experts, Some Newcomers

Faculty members were all over the board in describing their online-teaching experience prior to the spring semester.

- Very experienced
- Somewhat experienced
- Not very experienced
- Not at all experienced



Source: *Chronicle* survey

# Engage Your Faculty

This spring took a lot out of professors. They had to quickly overhaul their courses and support students through a host of challenges — all while having to adjust themselves to life in a pandemic. Now they will have to prepare for more disruption in the fall, even as students and parents expect a better learning experience.

How can colleges help professors through this next leg? Kim Lynch, senior system director for educational innovations in the Minnesota State colleges, says it's important to help them learn from one another, and to acknowledge the work they have done so far.

As its 30 colleges and seven universities prepared to move to emergency online teaching this spring, the system organized a virtual event to enable professors to connect with colleagues from across its institutions who teach in the same cluster of disciplines. Despite short notice, 1,812 instructors participated, says Lynch.

While her staff members supported the event, each group's discussion was facilitated by faculty members within a disciplinary cluster. Professors, after all, want to know how a particular teaching approach can work in courses like the ones they teach — and they want to hear it from their peers.

Among the ideas discussed:

- Professors in business, management, and marketing said they would reach out to classes at an international sister

college to connect via Zoom and other platforms.

- Biology professors shared information on more than 40 resources for virtual or simulated labs, most of them free.
- Labs were also discussed in a group for engineering professors, in which one idea was to use instructors as “technicians” to whom students could give directions to complete the lab work.
- Professors of fine arts talked about conducting private music lessons in Zoom; those in physical education discussed recording fitness lessons on the platform.

consequent economic decline on their livelihoods and mental health.

Afterward, participants were able to access relevant information from their group's session and other resources online.

Lynch's office hopes to continue with these disciplinary gatherings, though the details have not yet been worked out.

She also emphasized the importance of “recognizing and respecting faculty for what they've gained in this experience” as colleges work to build a better version of online instruction for the fall.

Professors who'd never taught online before this spring learned how to use free materials. They lectured via Zoom. They recorded videos for the first time. Instructors might not have adjusted their courses in all of the ways an expert in online teaching would suggest. But they surely learned something, and that knowledge can be built on.

“It becomes easy for

those who've worked in intentional online work for a long time to sort of dismiss those as subpar,” Lynch says. “I think if we do that, we've just negated any ground that we've made with faculty who took a real leap of faith to do something.”

— BECKIE SUPIANO



Kim Lynch

The event, “Keep Teaching Through Covid-19: The Great Minnesota State Disciplinary Get Together,” also included a student panel. That helped professors understand the challenges of remote learning for students, as well as the toll of the pandemic and the



U. OF SOUTH FLORIDA

A faculty member collaborates with a learning designer at the U. of South Florida on strategies to engage students online.

in front of them,” he says. “Faculty do not have the capacity to think about fall yet.”

The mad dash to move courses online this spring has been just one source of stress for instructors — and for those who help them improve their teaching. Gunder, of the Online Learning Consortium, worries that some colleges that have been furloughing teaching experts may be undercutting themselves in the process. “I’ve seen whole departments responsible for teaching and learning just wiped off the map,” she says.

To quickly get up to speed, higher-education experts say that colleges should do the following as soon as possible:

- **Evaluate the spring semester.** You won’t know how to plan for the fall until you identify gaps in training, organization, and technology. A number of colleges

have started that process by doing formal assessments of remote teaching this spring. That may include surveying students and instructional faculty mem-

“If we didn’t make this investment and students weren’t provided access to the coursework needed for timely graduation, they’d look somewhere else.”

## In Their Own Words: Faculty

*The Chronicle* asked faculty members to describe the most important lesson they learned from teaching this spring. These were some of their answers.

“A new appreciation for how very hard students will work under less than optimal conditions to succeed in their courses.”

“Science labs, research, and art-design studios where students need to use specialized equipment just didn’t happen. Written exercises do not provide the hands-on opportunities that prepare students for work in these fields. Virtual labs are like expecting some could learn how to ride a bike by reading about how to do it. The skills just do not translate.”

“Assessment needs a deep rethinking.”

“Be compassionate. Be understanding. Be patient. We are all human. At the end of the day, there are more important things affecting students, so my instruction and my expectations must challenge students while also helping them to work through and understand life’s challenges.”

“In a time of a pandemic, do your best and forgive the rest.”

“My students’ social and emotional needs were more pressing than their academic challenges.”

“Moving online did help me learn some useful pedagogical deliveries and ways to make some of my teaching enterprise more efficient.”

“Be patient with yourself and your students. This is new to everyone. Be flexible and creative. What works for one colleague may not work for others.”

“Being forced to think about teaching online made me reconsider how I’ve been teaching for 30-plus years in the classroom. I’m surprised to realize that this experience probably will make me a better instructor when we return to classes on campus.”

“Being on Zoom for seven hours a day is really bad for you, and exhausting. It’s easy to work ALL THE TIME, and that’s not good for anyone. Pacing.”

“Compassion and flexibility. Many of the students I teach faced difficult personal situations moving back home. I teach in a semirural area, so most of my students had difficulty accessing reliable internet. Many also had significant stress related to family and work during this crisis.”

“Despite the positive aspects of online teaching, it became apparent that without the personal contact, students are far more likely to disengage and not do well in class.”

“I learned the difference between online teaching — with time to plan for the format — and emergency remote teaching.”

“How important it is for faculty to support one another. I already taught some online courses, and my one online course this spring was already online. I was able to be a resource for others.”

“That nothing can replace face-to-face teaching.”

“Be comfortable with silence. Our instinct is to fill every moment, but technology can create a lag in response. I was open with my students that I would wait until someone responded, because I wanted them to be comfortable communicating via Zoom. All are finance majors and will need to work remotely with clients or colleagues throughout their careers.”

“How many students lack proper access to Wi-Fi?”

“My home internet is unreliable. It takes a significant amount of additional time to prepare online content for a class that signed up for classroom-based courses. My students, especially those with kids, struggled to stay on track.”

“Some course content can be taught effectively online, some can be taught online but not effectively, and some cannot be taught online at all. Online learning is not a panacea, even if it can be a solution to some situations.”

“I persevered.”

# Prepare Your Gateway Courses

**M**ost colleges don't have time to design high-quality online versions of every course.

That means they will have to pick their spots. And there's probably no more urgent spot than large introductory courses.

Gateway classes, after all, have lots of students. Given the challenges of social distancing, these courses are unlikely to operate normally even if colleges resume in-person classes in the fall, says Tim McKay, associate dean for undergraduate education at the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Michigan's president, Mark Schlissel, has said he's "cautiously optimistic" that the university will be able to deliver "as much in-person instruction as possible" in the fall. Gateway courses will "probably be conducted in a hybrid form, at least," says McKay, who helps lead a project to improve foundational courses there. That means professors must plan for some degree of online instruction.

One "not too unattractive" possibility, McKay says, is having students back on campus take their large courses remotely, but still meet in-person for smaller discussion groups.

Ideally, a course would be set up to allow students to learn online or in person — and to switch as needed, individually or as a group, he says. "Flexibility is going to be at the center of success in the fall."

Other key considerations for those preparing gateway courses include:

**Motivation:** Helping students in large classes connect and form a sense of community "has to be a real focal point for course design," McKay says. It's critical, he says, that students communicate reg-



Tim McKay

ularly with one another and with the instructional team so that they stay motivated. The small-discussion component that many courses already have, he adds, is one natural place to address that.

**Assessment:** Evaluating online learning is a particular challenge for gateway courses, McKay says. That's in part because these courses have a tendency to rely on the kind of "timed, high-stakes, multiple-choice exam" that education experts say is not particularly meaningful. While some professors have

turned to proctoring software to monitor students as they take those tests, that's not what Michigan is doing, he says. The better approach, in his view: Give students authentic assessments, like open-book tests with generous time limits. Those are the kinds of conditions, McKay points out, under which people solve problems on the job.

**Equity:** One function of gateway courses has been to weed out lower-performing students, and some professors still view that as a key part of their job. As colleges have enrolled more students from lower-income and first-generation families, however, evidence suggests that such sorting can reinforce existing inequities. That problem, McKay says, is magnified during a pandemic, which is hitting such groups disproportionately hard. To avoid being part of the problem, he says, professors need to move "away from the sense that any purpose of the class, especially for a gateway class, is to rank students based on ability." The purpose of an introductory course, in short, is to introduce students to a discipline, not decide who the best students are and who shouldn't make the cut. For that reason, McKay says, "I hope that anyone who's thinking about designing these courses is thinking really hard about whether they've made them flexible enough to really work for students who are in very different circumstances."

— B.S.

bers about their experiences.

One clear trouble spot identified by many colleges has been a lack of reliable access to technology — by both professors and students. In a poll by Educause, a nonprofit focused on the use of technology in education, 63 percent of institutions reported that students had some difficulty in getting the Wi-Fi or bandwidth they needed to do their work remotely. Nearly half of students had difficulty collaborating with other students remotely.

Another challenge that surfaced, particularly as the semester rolled on: faculty burnout. Stressed by child care, health worries, and the challenges of emergency remote teaching, instructors may require additional support in the coming months should they need to continue teaching online in the fall.

- **Assess campus resources.** How many instructional designers, academic-technology experts, learning scientists, IT

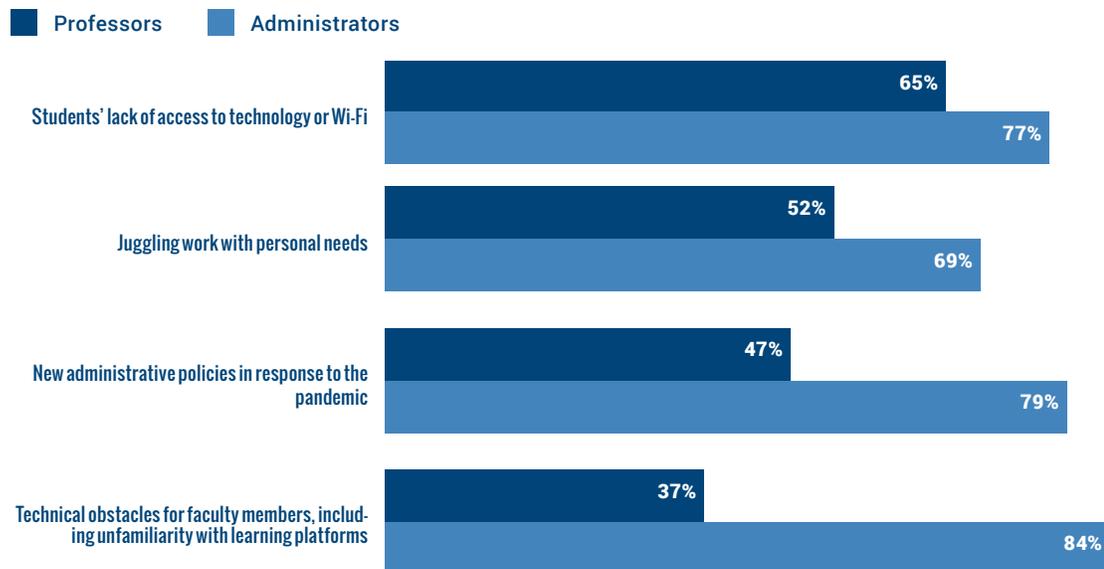
specialists, and faculty members with experience online teaching do you have on your campus? And how effectively do they work together?

Some colleges found that they did not deploy these resources in the spring as well as they could have because different groups operate independently of one another. “We’ve heard of some institutions going full-force into professional development and comprehensive design support for their faculty, while others have offices and centers of teaching and learning that are not being utilized at all,” says Gunder, of the Online Learning Consortium. “Part of the issue is that many institutions have not embedded a digital strategy into their institutional strategy.”

- **Encourage conversations within departments and schools.** While senior administrators need to make final decisions, each department and school will have to figure out which courses

## A Set of Struggles

Faculty members and administrators described the following factors as “very” or “somewhat” challenging to remote teaching and learning this spring.



Source: Chronicle survey

# 44%

**Faculty members who knew of at least one colleague or personal acquaintance who contracted Covid-19**

# 1 in 4

**Professors who had at least one student who contracted Covid-19**

Source: *Chronicle survey*

can most easily transition to online or hybrid instruction, and which ones must be taught in person. (See sidebar, Page 9.)

Academic leaders will also need to ask departments to think creatively about teaching and course design. Over the summer, can they develop well-designed online versions of gateway courses (see sidebar, Page 12), which typically enroll large numbers of students and are particularly problematic to teach with social distancing? Can they identify faculty members who need the most help with effective online teaching and direct them to summer training programs? Can they suggest ways to pro-

vide training and support for adjunct faculty members, who often carry the bulk of the load teaching introductory courses?

And, finally, if a college plans to teach online in the fall, which courses do professors want to spend time on, to create the best possible online experience, and which ones might they choose not to offer? Davis, the consultant, described this as “culling the herd.”

- **Identify the missing pieces.** Depending on your institution’s plans — most colleges are gaming out multiple options for the fall — you may find that you lack enough resources in certain areas. Maybe you need to train more faculty members in effective online teaching practices. Or you need to find better courseware, especially open-educational resources, in order to design a series of fully online courses. Or you discover that if a professor gets sick, nobody else in the department is equipped to teach that course. For each challenge, you will need to consider what you can outsource, where you could revamp existing job descriptions to fill gaps, and where you need to make strategic investment and hiring decisions.

The Alamo Colleges District is looking at how it can use people in new ways, says Luke Dowden, chief online learning officer and associate vice chancellor of academic student success. Given that many social events on campus this fall will be canceled, he suggests that some student-affairs staff members with master’s degrees in education, for example, be retrained to become instructional assistants to support online or hybrid classes. “We can’t ignore that some people’s jobs have changed,” Dowden says.

## SUMMER AS A TEST RUN

Some colleges have increased faculty-training programs in order to create higher-quality online courses for the summer and lay the groundwork for multiple options in the fall. (See sidebar, Page 18.) An Educause poll of more than 500 insti-

tutions in mid-May found that 81 percent were expanding training for the use of instructional tools, 77 percent were increasing work with instructional and learning designers, and 42 percent were increasing professional-development opportunities for humanizing online learning.

California State University at Fullerton, following the announcement by the CSU system that the majority of courses this fall will be taught remotely, is evaluating which courses absolutely need some sort of in-person component and which can go online. So it is making sure faculty members are prepared to teach virtually.

That is not the same as teaching instructors to design a fully online course, which comes with a different set of standards and faces a course-approval process, says Erica Bowers, director of the Faculty Development Center. Her team is also looking to share training and online coursework across the 23-campus Cal State system. “We begged, borrowed, and stole from each other to get up and running” this spring, Bowers says. “And

we’re going to continue to do that.”

Emory University also has a head start but is similarly challenged to train a

**“Effective online teaching depends more on building engagement than on mastering complicated technology.”**

critical mass of professors to teach online. It began developing online courses for undergraduates, primarily in its summer programs, six years ago. About 60 faculty members have gone through a robust, eight-week training program to learn how to design and teach an online course, says Sara Jackson Wade, senior associate director of Emory College Online and summer programs, who is overseeing the move to

COURTESY OF SARA JACKSON WADE



Sara Jackson Wade, senior associate director of Emory College Online and summer programs, is overseeing the move to equip more professors to teach online.

## In Their Own Words: Administrators

*The Chronicle* asked academic administrators to describe the most important lesson they learned from their institutions' move to online instruction this spring. These were some of their answers.

"Faculty engagement and commitment to students is tremendous. Communication is critical; anxiety is very high. It's important to say and repeat the same message in multiple avenues."

"Past discussions and formal requirements of the instructional-continuity plan helped in translating those to the current crisis. Effective IT services and ongoing training of faculty helped in the transition. Local data can be at variance with national data due to a variety of factors, including socio-economics. For example, students at my institution (and their parents) overwhelmingly preferred synchronous over asynchronous learning."

"As a health-science university, we discovered that many of our courses that we previously thought could not be done in an online format were possible. There was more creativity in our course delivery than we thought."

"How much energy we generate when we're in the same space together. We can work remotely with success, but productivity levels are far different. We've had to let some things go. We set priorities and focused on the most important things."

"Challenge balancing high-quality learning experience with very real equity concerns."

"Many faculty members need help with instructional design for online teaching. Simply moving the in-class experience to an online environment is not sufficient to provide a valued online learning experience."

"Clear and consistent messaging to all members of the university community is essential."

"Faculty were more game than I expected and were absolutely committed to making it the best possible experience for their students in the circumstances."

"Flexibility is key."

"How the remote-learning environment polarizes our instructional faculty. Those most resistant to teaching online became more resistant after teaching remotely; those open to learning about online teaching became much more open to it after the experience of remote delivery."

"How under prepared both students and faculty were for online education. Shame on us for that."

"Remote learning is here to stay. We must prepare now for possible waves 2 and 3 of the pandemic. All disciplines should be open to hybrid courses at the minimum."

"I knew we had an exceptional faculty, but their ability to rise to the occasion in the face of this kind of adversity was truly awe-inspiring. The entire faculty stepped up and came together to quickly pivot online: over spring break, they immediately shifted gears to develop course continuity plans and revamp their courses; those who were not already distance-learning certified participated in two weeks of online and remote instruction trainings; and they worked closely with our students to facilitate the smoothest possible transition."

"Many faculty and staff have little access to technology and high speed internet at home. The divide was exacerbated in rural areas."

"Better process management would've made the transition much easier."

"Providing informed psychosocial support and leadership for faculty was essential to a successful remote transition, superseding technological support and resources."

"The institution vastly overestimated the capacity of students to move to online learning and while staff did their best, their courses were not designed for online teaching. Reinventing everything on the fly while having to home-school children and look after families placed an enormous psychological burden on lecturers."

equip more professors to teach online.

Her team is now focused on training another 90 faculty members in a three-week version of that program so they can “move out of emergency remote teaching and something closer to best practices in online learning,” she says. That will allow Emory to offer all of its 140 summer courses online.

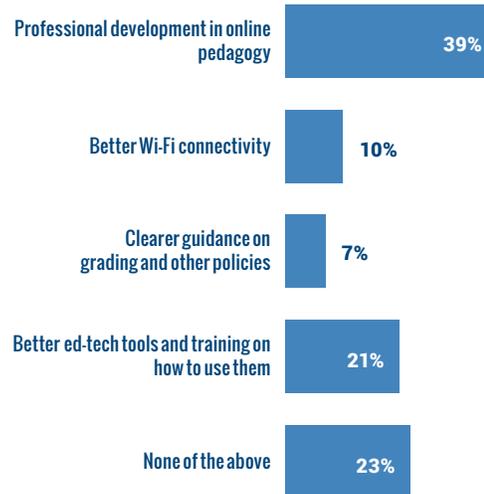
Effective online teaching, Wade says, depends more on building engagement than on mastering complicated technology. The summer training will focus on setting up an asynchronous course, akin to a flipped classroom, where students study material on their own and then come to class expected to discuss what they’re learning. The program will also focus on how professors can use online tools to create a more vibrant online experience.

By the start of the summer, about 20 percent of Emory’s tenure-track and lecture-track faculty members will be trained in effective online course design and teaching, Wade estimates. That, combined with work the university has been doing to redesign some foundational courses, will help prepare it for more remote teaching in the fall, if needed. Those revamped courses are easier to move online, she says, because all professors in a department had agreed on a common curriculum and common assessment methods, and developed a

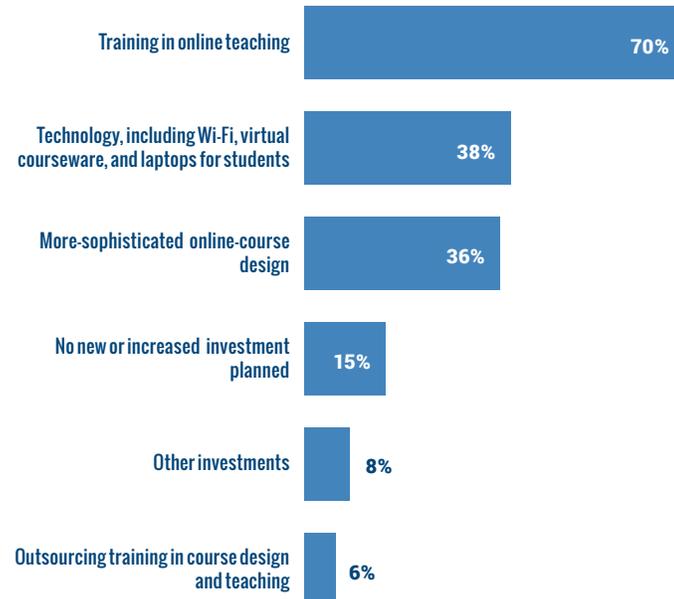
## A Path to Better Online Teaching

Faculty members and administrators both rated professional development as the top need for successful online teaching in the fall.

Here’s what faculty members say they need most to teach online this fall:



Here’s what administrators plan to invest in to help faculty members:



Note: Because respondents could choose multiple answers, percentages will not add up to 100.

Source: Chronicle survey

# Make the Most of the Internet

To some professors, teaching online can feel limiting, especially at first. You're not in the same room as your students, and maybe you're not even "live." But people can do things on the internet that aren't possible face to face, online experts say, and a well-designed course takes advantage of that.

Every college says it offers



Robin DeRosa

students a particular vision of learning, like focusing on high-impact practices or fostering collaboration, says Robin DeRosa, director of the Open Learning & Teaching Collaborative at Plymouth State University, in New Hampshire. With some effort, those same

aims can be achieved in online courses. "The key is when you move online," she says, "you don't just want to strip away all of the things that make your institution special."

Instead of viewing online teaching as a limitation, DeRosa says, "we should start with the question: What are the ways I want to broaden this class or connect this class to the world that I haven't tried before?"

Here are some examples of what that might look like:

- A professor who usually takes students to visit a community they're learning about in class might instead have students create an online resource for that community to use.
- An instructor could have a guest speaker — perhaps the author of a text the class has studied — join the class discussion. That's easier without the logistics or expense of bringing someone to campus. If social distancing continues, DeRosa adds, a big-name speaker might be more available to participate.
- Professors whose courses touch on related themes — say, an environmental-studies course and one on the writings of Thoreau — could have their students collaborate without needing to get them into the same room at the same time.

"There's some real opportunity to do stuff that maybe you'd always dreamt about doing but it was really clunky to do it when it was face to face," DeRosa says. "But the internet in some ways can make it really easy for people to connect across time and space."

Moving in this direction, DeRosa says, requires professors to go beyond the focus on content and competencies that many gravitate toward when they first teach online. They will need professional development and the support of instructional designers who know how to develop relationships and build community online.

Colleges can also look for opportunities to tie what students are learning in class to what's happening around them as the world grapples with the coronavirus — as some professors have already done in various ways this spring. Students' courses can give them a chance to think about "what it's like to mediate your life through technology," she says — and "what it's like to live through a pandemic."

Instead of seeking a way to make courses this fall as similar as possible to what they would usually be, colleges could instead respond to what's happening, DeRosa says — and give students a chance to engage intellectually, in new and different ways.

— B.S.

library of resources that they put into the learning-management system.

“That looks a lot different than taking your face-to-face syllabus and mapping it online,” she says.

At the University of Central Florida, Thomas B. Cavanagh, vice provost for digital learning, estimates that more than 80 percent of its 1,600 faculty members had received some form of professional development for teaching online before the coronavirus hit, ranging from self-paced training on how to use the learning-management system to the university’s 10-week online-course-design program. Given the need to rapidly prepare hundreds of instructors, says Cavanagh, the university is in the process of developing a streamlined three-week course, “essentials of online teaching,” through which it expects to train around 200 instructors. About 350 instructors will also take a short course called “teaching through lecture capture — Zoom edition,” he says.

Despite its extensive online catalog — about one-third of undergraduate courses are taken online — Cavanagh says that it’s still not sufficient to cover every subject this fall. His staff is mapping out scenarios in which the university supplements its online course offerings with a cohort of in-person classes where as many as two-thirds of the students are learning at a distance.

### CHANGING THE CALENDAR

Some colleges have decided to restructure their academic calendars in order to pivot quickly in the fall. If there is a surge in infections in early fall, for example, they might be forced to close their campuses. In other cases they might need to start the semester online if there is a local or state government ban on large gatherings but be able to reopen later in the term. Here are a few options that have surfaced so far:

Beloit College was among the first colleges to announce a calendar change. It pushed back its start date and divided its semester into two seven-week terms, with students taking two courses in each. That way, if the college needs to either

start or end the fall remotely, students will be managing only two online courses at a time, says Eric Boynton, the provost.

East Carolina University also plans to use “block scheduling,” to divide both the fall and spring semesters into two eight-

**Several colleges plan to end classroom instruction before Thanksgiving, to eliminate the health risks associated with travel.**

week terms. Brown University is considering three terms: fall, spring, and summer, with students attending only two of them.

Several colleges plan to end classroom instruction before Thanksgiving, to eliminate the health risks associated with travel. Purdue University and Lake Superior State University will start their semesters earlier in August. Rice University will start at its regularly scheduled time, says David LeBron, the president, but will add a few more class sessions before Thanksgiving. Students will complete all final exams, projects, and other assessments remotely.

For Rice, this is part of a broader strategy of transitioning all of its fall courses to “dual mode,” says LeBron. All courses, with limited exceptions, will be offered both in person and remotely. That will require spending on classroom technology so that sessions can be recorded or beamed live to students elsewhere, he says. And professors will receive additional training in effective online-teaching practices, as well as training in using remote learning technologies.

Colgate University has redesigned its calendar in several ways. First, it is dividing each of its semesters into two grading periods. While courses will still run for the entire semester, professors are being asked to develop assignments

Tracey Hucks, the provost and dean of faculty at Colgate U., says that the university has redesigned its academic calendar to provide more flexibility for the uncertainties of the fall.



COLGATE U.

and assessments so that if a student gets sick halfway through, she would receive a grade and partial course credit. Creating this structure will also make it easier to either start online or move online midsemester, should public-health concerns make that necessary, says Tracey Hucks, the provost.

Colgate is also creating January and June terms. January will be designated for makeup work for courses that students couldn't finish because of Covid-19. Intensive, month-long courses will be offered in June, on an as-needed basis, for those who were unable to carry a full course load because of Covid-19. Both will be free of charge, says Hucks.

To continue to improve its online courses and prepare for the fall, Colgate will invest in more professional development, perhaps through the New York Six Liberal Arts Consortium, which supports collaboration among member institutions. "What does it mean to think about a course from the beginning to the end?" asks Hucks. "We want to give them that kind of training."

Whether calendar changes become more common remains to be seen, although interest in these options may be growing. In a May survey by the American

Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, 28 percent of respondents using the semester system said they

**"We are struggling, like everyone else, with distinctions between remote teaching and online learning."**

may delay, or had delayed, the start of the term. Another 28 percent said they will end, or may end, the semester earlier than normal. And 36 percent said they'd added or may add terms shorter than full-length sessions.

Such changes also require investments in training and technology, college leaders note. Professors will need time and support to redesign courses so they can more easily move between online and in-person instruction; make tests and other assessments adaptable to an online environment; and develop strategies to foster collaboration among students,

# Think Creatively About What You Teach

Jody Greene was feeling frustrated. Most of the discussions that Greene, associate vice provost for teaching and learning at the University of California at Santa Cruz, was hearing about instructors preparing for the fall were focused on the method of delivery and not on the content of the course itself. Greene firmly believes that if colleges are going to thrive online this fall, they need to “radically rethink” what and how they teach.

As she posted on Twitter, if colleges “plan’ to replicate biz as usual, we’re totally missing an opportunity here by thinking inside the box. What if we break the box?”

Colleges, she continued, don’t have to choose between bringing students to campus and shifting existing courses online. “What if most students stay home,” she wrote, “but use the skills they’ve already developed to keep learning?”

Greene’s tweets kicked off an interesting discussion. Professors shared their own ideas: Give students more control over their learning. Find ways

to foster online community engagement. Create learning communities without specific outputs or outcomes. Have students study the way people learn online.

Giulia Forsythe, associate director of the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation at Brock University, in Ontario, wrote, “What if we made the fall term a giant interdisciplinary inquiry seminar” instead of having stu-

dents take four or five different courses. She pointed to the example of a first-year seminar program at the University of Guelph in which students study big ideas, like happiness or failure.

Even if colleges stick to business as

usual on an institutional level, professors could move in this direction with their own courses. One idea: Courses could be designed around service work in which students help communities upended by the pandemic.

What might that look like?

- Students could help nonprofits affected by the pandemic, Greene said in an interview with *The Chronicle*. For



Jody Greene

instance, those with video and web-design skills could help groups raise money by creating videos or websites highlighting their work for prospective donors, as a substitute for canceled fund-raising events.

- Students studying graphic design, communication, or public health could help design public-service campaigns with messages meant to limit the coronavirus’s spread.

In addition to helping the community and giving students a way to keep learning, such projects could bring another benefit, Greene says. “Students are so traumatized. If you give them the opportunity to contribute something, you also are doing something absolutely essential by allowing them to bring their strengths to a situation beyond their control.”

— B.S.

some of whom may be learning remotely while others are on campus.

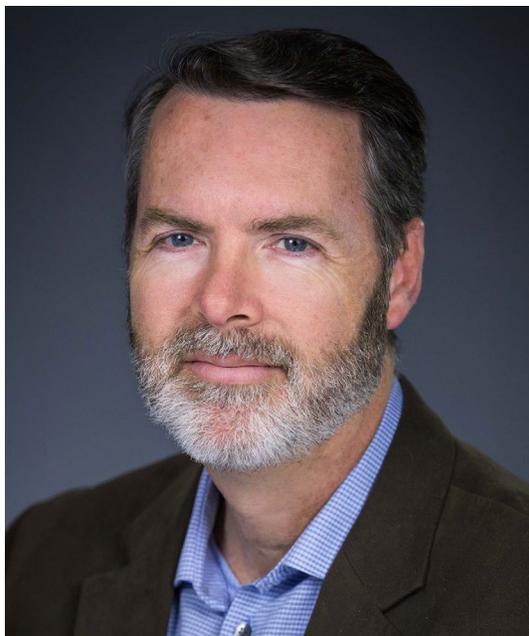
### **HYFLEX AND OTHER HYBRID MODELS**

As colleges think about how to plan for all contingencies, one model has gotten increasing attention. Called HyFlex, which stands for Hybrid and Flexible, it was created in 2005 by Brian J. Beatty, an associate professor of instructional technologies at San Francisco State University.

This model offers students several options simultaneously: in-person, asynchronous, and synchronous learning. Such a structure works well in a pandemic, Beatty says, because it gives control to the students. On any given day, they can take the class remotely or in person: All coursework is designed and offered both ways.

Content is probably the easiest part to adapt to the HyFlex model, he says, because many courses already use digital textbooks, and professors can quickly put course content into their learning-management systems.

Engagement is trickier. If students beam in live through a videoconferencing tool like Zoom, the professor must simultaneously manage the class discussion for both in person and remote students. Beatty has found success asking students in his classroom to



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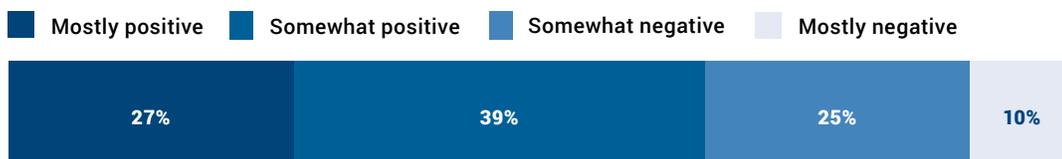
**Brian J. Beatty**

keep an eye on the chat function and chime in when their online classmates have a comment or questions.

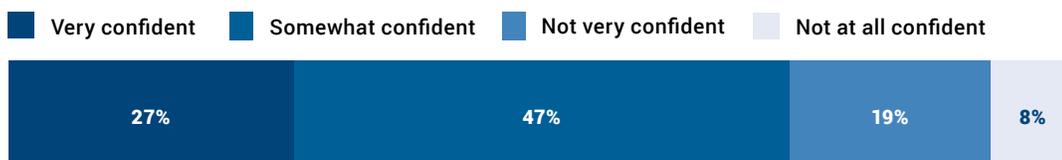
For all students, whether they listen to the taped lecture later, attend via video, or show up in person, the professor needs to find a way for them to interact. Beatty has

## **Something to Build On**

About two-thirds of professors said their experience teaching remotely this spring was positive.



Nearly three-quarters of them are confident about teaching entirely or mostly online this fall.

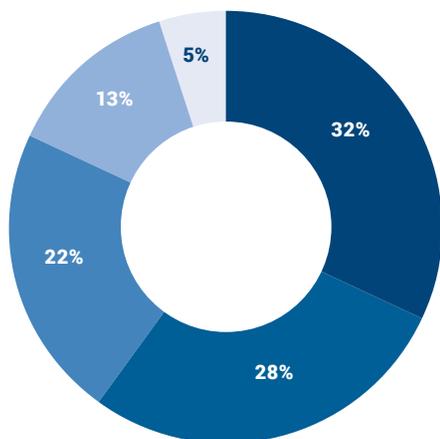


Source: Chronicle survey

## Feeling Supported

A majority of faculty members said they received “most” or “all of” the logistical, pedagogical, and technical support they needed from their institutions when teaching remotely this spring. The rest said support was adequate or worse.

- All of the support I needed
- An adequate amount of support
- Most of the support
- Barely sufficient support
- Little to no support



Source: Chronicle survey

found it useful to create online activities for all students, such as small-group assignments or a discussion board. As the number of digital-collaboration tools expand, Beatty says, instructors will have more and better options on this front.

Assessments will also need to be clearly thought out, including whether you will need any online proctoring tools for exams.

Beatty has come across dozens of institutions that offer courses or programs using similar models, with names like Flex-Learning, Comodal, and Flexible Hybrid. While HyFlex and other models are built for adaptation, they also require a lot of upfront planning.

Jody Greene, associate vice provost for teaching and learning at the University of California at Santa Cruz, is wary of the HyFlex model: “It’s continuing the fantasy that you can teach via videoconferencing and

call it remote instruction.” If colleges want to offer flexibility, she argues, it’s better to create two separate courses, one online and one in person. Each can be tailored to the learning environment and can incorporate effective teaching practices.

In general, college leaders will need to consider the time and other expenses required to adapt courses to hybrid teaching. “Make sure you have a real need to do both,” says Beatty. “You’re going to put work into this.”

At Rice, where almost all courses will be offered both person and remotely, that will necessitate spending on classroom technology, like cameras to record and broadcast lectures, says LeBron. And professors will receive additional training in effective online teaching practices, as well as training in using remote learning technologies.

According to the Educause poll, 82 percent of institutions that have started planning for the fall said they were preparing for a scenario in which they use multimodal forms of teaching, like Hyflex, that combine online and face-to-face students.

### COLLABORATION AND CONSORTIA

Colleges better positioned for a fall that is online, or partially online, may be those with more-collaborative approaches to course design and resource sharing, including community colleges, college consortia, and colleges operating within state systems.

**Professors will need time and support to redesign courses so they can more easily move between online and in-person instruction.**

Although they operate on shoestring budgets, community colleges are used to adapting their offerings to fit students’ needs, says Davis, the consultant. “They’re thinking

# Connect With Your Students

Professors often worry that if they teach online, they won't be able to forge meaningful connections with students. They're used to reading the energy in a classroom and bumping into their students on campus. Karen Costa has some good news: "It is absolutely possible to build positive, supportive, healthy online communities without ever being in the same room with our students."

Costa, an online-learning specialist who wrote *99 Tips For Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos*, knows this from years of experience. Here are some tactics she suggests:

- Building a relationship can sound daunting. So focus instead on making connections. Learning even simple details about one another — do you prefer hot dogs or hamburgers? — helps students succeed and makes instructors feel better about their teaching.
- Learning online can be isolating. To address that head-on, professors might make a video to introduce students to their courses. A colleague of Costa's recently shared one that included an appearance by her dog. "That's a perfect example of a humanizing approach," she says. If even that much personal

sharing feels uncomfortable, professors can instead connect by talking about what excites them about their disciplines.

- Give students a way to introduce themselves and to explain why they're in the class. As much as possible, use students' names. While it can be tough to do so in a large class, it goes a long way.

Costa also notes that many professors struggle with the idea of asynchronous classes, because they think synchronous teaching is more personal. When colleges moved to emergency remote instruction this spring, many professors turned to videoconferencing because they badly wanted to see their students, and it seemed most similar to the in-person experience.

Synchronous teaching is not bad, Costa says; it just has to be used in moderation. Small sessions, done well, can provide the kind of human touch that professors might have found elusive in their hourlong Zoom classes.

Synchronous elements also tend to make sense in certain contexts: office hours, question-and-answer sessions, and, yes, getting to know students less formally. A professor could have a 30-minute synchronous session welcoming students to a course, Costa says, and

use the occasion to give students tips for succeeding. Synchronous need not mean video, she adds — but when it does, don't require students to turn on their cameras. They could have any number of reasons for wanting to keep them off, and forcing the issue doesn't exactly deepen the professor/student bond.

More than anything else, Costa suggests that professors new to online teaching take a well-designed online course or participate in a virtual learning community. When they do, she says, "faculty are empowered to see, 'Oh, my gosh, I can handle relationships online.' And it shows them how they can do that with their students."

— B.S.



Karen Costa

about a working adult who is juggling a job and family, who might not have control over their work schedule. Or they're thinking about how to create smaller chunks of programs so if a student has to sit out a little bit because of life, they're not going to get behind an entire semester."

To prepare for all contingencies, the Virginia Community College System is accelerating its use of open educational resources, laboratory simulations, and "course sharing" among its 23 campuses, says Sheri L. Prupis, director of teaching and learning technologies. In course sharing, one campus could enroll students in the online version of a course that's also being offered by another campus, she says, or it could simply share a course "shell" in which some content is already in a learning-management system and ready to be taught.

Prupis also oversees training for instructors to teach online summer courses, which began in May. She estimates that about five of her colleges do not have the staff to provide online teacher training for their instructors, so in those cases faculty members will participate in system-wide training programs.

While she feels good about the webinars on how to use Canvas, Zoom, and online library resources, she knows many instructors need more help on effective teaching strategies. "We are struggling, like everyone else, with distinctions between remote teaching and online learning," she says. "For the summer we want faculty members to understand that there are different ways to teach. You can get away with a 40-minute lecture in person, but not on Zoom."

To that end, Prupis, who serves on a systemwide Covid-19 task force, is working with others to devise lessons on best teaching practices, and perhaps to require instructors to seek certification in preparation for a possible fall online.

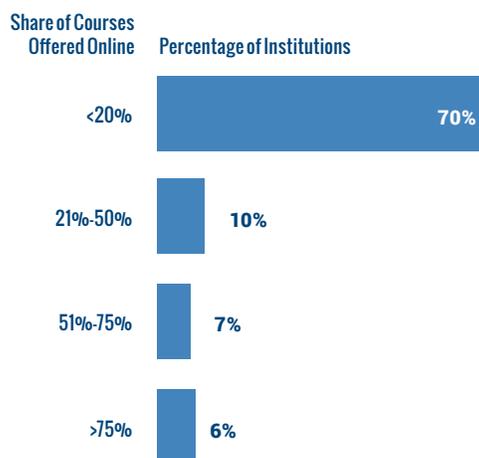
As for career- and technical-training programs, many of which require hands-on learning, Prupis says that, like other colleges, the Virginia system is talking about front-loading the lecture portion of courses and, if restrictions are lifted, creating, say, two weeks of intensive lab work near

the end of the term. But her team is also considering virtual simulations, kits that can be sent to students so they can perform experiments at home, and other strategies.

Like others, she worries less about conveying content online this fall and more about the social aspect of learning: the connections that students forge among themselves, and with their professors. "How can we use Zoom and Canvas and Slack and

## Typical Online Offerings, Pre-Covid-19

The majority of institutions said that 20 percent or fewer of their courses were typically offered online before the spring.



Source: Chronicle survey

Google Meet to create a small consortium of students who move through the course together?" she asks. "We're not there yet. But a few of us are beating that drum."

Within the University System of Maryland, the William E. Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation acts as a matchmaker and resource-sharing unit, says MJ Bishop, associate vice chancellor and director. As planning shifts toward the fall, she is encouraging institutions to collaborate. Already, students can take courses through the system's online institution, the University of Maryland Global Cam-

# Lead a Good Online Discussion

Even under ordinary circumstances, leading a good class discussion ranks among the hardest aspects of teaching. It's one of the topics Jesse Stommel is most often asked about when he runs faculty-development workshops. So it's no wonder that during the transition to remote teaching, many instructors have found it particularly challenging to foster lively online discussions.

It's possible to hold good class discussions synchronously (say in Zoom) or asynchronously (through discussion boards), says Stommel, a senior lecturer and digital-learning fellow at the University of Mary Washing-

“Think about ways of getting your students to talk to one another, as much as getting students to talk to you as the teacher.”

ton, in Virginia. Synchronous conversations can provide a feeling of being together,

he says, while asynchronous discussion provides access, letting in students from all kinds of situations.

Offering a mix of formats can work well, Stommel says. In his courses, he makes synchronous discussion optional, by, say, letting students choose among posting in a discussion forum, writing a blog post, or participating in a Zoom chat. This avoids penalizing students who can't make it to a video meeting — and it also enriches the discussion, since the students who participate have chosen this format.

For Stommel, the key to a good online discussion is this: “Think about ways of getting your students to talk to one another, as much as getting students to talk to you as the teacher.”

Here are his suggestions:

**Make Space:** Online courses sometimes require students to hit a quota of original comments and responses to classmates' posts — and then the professor replies to each one. That's

not a good setup, Stommel says, because it “turns the conversation into a game of



Jesse Stommel

Ping-Pong, in which every student is directing their comment at the teacher and then the teacher is responding.” Besides, putting a bunch of rules in place has a tendency to shut down students' natural desire to talk to one another.

When professors teach in person, they're often advised to lengthen the amount of time they pause between posing a question and saying something else. They should step back, let silence fall, and give students time to respond. The same holds true online — only more so. After

posting a question in a discussion forum, Stommel says, “sometimes I wait days.” What often happens, he says, is “one person will step in, and then there will be an avalanche of other students contributing.”

**Facilitate:** When professors do weigh in, their role is to facilitate. That means looking for patterns in the conversation, pointing to similarities – and tensions – among comments that different students have made, and describing those back to the class.

In a physical classroom, professors can scan the room for raised hands or bodies leaning forward – and even listen for the intake of breath to determine which students are waiting to speak. When that discussion moves to a videoconference, “one of the hardest things is to figure out when people want to speak,” Stommel says, “and how to draw them out.”

Professors can learn a new set of cues. Students probably won’t lean forward, but they might reach to unmute themselves. Or they might unmute themselves, hear a classmate begin speaking, and set themselves back to mute. “You’re watching for indications that people want to step in,” Stommel says, “but they just look completely different in a Zoom.”

**Keep Track of Who’s Speaking:** Just as they would in person, professors leading discussions online should be attentive to which students are participating. Have all the students who answered this question been men? In a discussion of queer issues, has “not a single one of the openly queer students in the class” spoken? If such a pattern emerges, “think to yourself, what’s going on in the classroom that’s making that happen?” Stommel says. “And sometimes you’ll have a conversation with your students about that,” so they will pay attention to those dynamics going forward, too.

– B.S.

pus, and transfer credit to their home campus. Bishop anticipates that some under-resourced institutions may turn to the global campus for help in offering students key courses in the fall. But she’s not sure how quickly it can scale up to meet potential demand.

“It’s about figuring out what was most important and working best in your course before, and using a different environment to connect with those things.”

In the meantime, Bishop says, institutions should consider pairing up faculty members who are experienced in online teaching with those who aren’t, as well as creating and sharing well-designed online versions of gateway courses. As long as money and expertise are in limited supply, she says, resource-sharing is going to be integral to getting higher education successfully through the fall semester. “We better be able to point to the things we’ve done better in the summer and fall,” she says. “It’s going to matter to the students, to parents paying tuition, to regents, to everybody.”

## CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS

Developing and maintaining connections among students, and between professors and students, may be the trickiest aspect of online learning, but it’s the most important. (See sidebar, Page 24.)

Students this spring said they missed their professors and classmates. Many found online versions of their courses unengaging or were generally uncomfortable with learning online. The physical distance between students and instructors, and the inability of technology to

convey the body language we rely on to read one another's moods and thoughts, creates an immediate barrier to intimacy and free-flowing discussion.

Robin DeRosa, director of the Open Learning and Teaching Collaborative at Plymouth State University, has asked faculty members and administrators to keep those concerns at the front of their minds as they plan for the fall.

"Students are generally looking for connection, learning, and a sense of purpose," she says. "It's not about building a flashy new course that we can show off. It's about figuring out what was most important and working best in your course before, and using a different environment to connect with those things."

Other teaching experts echo that concern, and have encouraged faculty members to think about different ways to engage with students come fall.

Greene, of Santa Cruz, says that some faculty members were disappointed this spring by students' lack of participation in videoconference-based classes. As the campus prepares for the possibility of remote instruction next term, Greene says she is encouraging them to think of other ways to

engage students. (See sidebar, Page 21.)

Professors can ask students to watch recorded lectures, or read the professor's notes, she says, and save class time for discussion. They can offer a lot of low-stakes

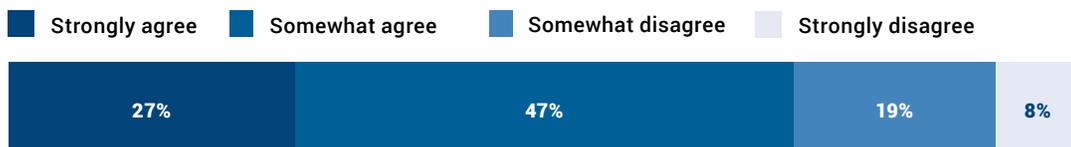
**"We better be able to point to the things we've done better in the summer and fall," she says. "It's going to matter to the students, to parents paying tuition, to regents, to everybody."**

assessments, ask students to work together on projects, or ask them to do small exercises, all of which keep students involved and connected. (See sidebar, Page 26.)

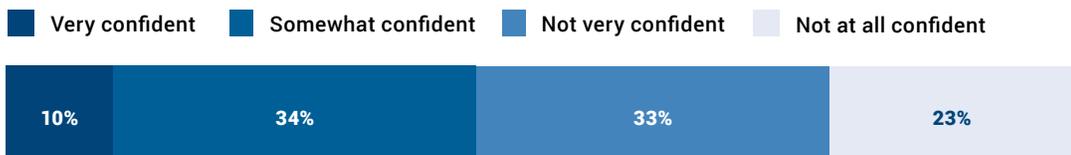
Greene also tells professors to be mind-

## Mixed Emotions About the Fall

Nearly three out of four surveyed professors "strongly" or "somewhat" agree they're looking forward to returning to in-person teaching in the fall.



But more than half lack confidence in their institution's ability to maintain social-distancing safeguards on campus.



Source: Chronicle survey

ful that what looks like lack of interest may actually be stress. To that end, Santa Cruz has developed workshops for faculty members on how to foster resilience in students. That might include sending regular reminders of due dates to the class or embedding links to technical and mental health support into coursework. “For students who are stressed out or traumatized,” she says, “we need to repeat ourselves a lot.”

Small residential colleges, whose appeal is rooted in a communal educational experience, may have the steepest hills to climb, should teaching remain online in the fall. Based on their experiences in the spring, college leaders say that professors will need to continue to invest a lot of time in reimagining that immersive experience online.

In addition to running live classes, professors at Connecticut College held extended office hours through remote videoconferencing this spring, checked in with students by phone, met with small groups of students during their classes, and assigned group work among classmates, says Michael Reder, director of the center for teaching and learning.

“I feel as if in most ways we are continuing to deliver the personalized education we always have,” he says. “Then there’s also the support we offer in terms of academic resources: student counseling services, tutoring, peer advisers. All of that is still happening. It’s happening virtually, but that is still happening.”

As academic leaders navigate the sum-

mer and prepare for instruction in the fall, they must balance a complex and interlocking series of challenges. As this report describes, they must review their experi-



79%

**Share of professors who said “creating a sense of engagement or connection between myself and my students” was “very” or “somewhat” challenging this spring.**

Source: Chronicle survey

ence with remote instruction in the summer, address shortcomings in technology and pedagogy, prepare faculty members or hybrid and online forms of teaching, invest wisely in training and technology, and seek outside assistance where needed. With careful planning, and an eye toward continuous improvement, they can ensure that they are prepared for all contingencies in the coming months.

SECTION 2



# Online Learning: What Does the Research Say?

By TOM BARTLETT

**G**eorge Veletsianos's new book turned out to be more timely than he imagined. Veletsianos, a professor of education and technology at Royal Roads University, in British Columbia, wrote *Learning Online: The Student Experience* in order to better understand what attending college via laptop feels like. With chapters like "The Learner Who Cheated" and "The Learner Who Was Taught by a Bot," the book doesn't ignore pitfalls; Veletsianos considers himself a "middle-of-the-road realist" when it comes to online education. But he also doesn't buy the idea that so-called face-to-face instruction is inherently superior. "Just because 20 people get together in a room doesn't mean that's going to be a great

learning experience,” he says.

Like a lot of other scholars who study the intersection of education and technology, Veletsianos finds his expertise in considerable demand during the pandemic. He's fielded plenty of queries from colleagues trying to retrofit their traditional, prof-at-a-lectern offerings for our new social-distanced reality. (He's also made his book, published by John Hopkins University Press, available free.) Suddenly everyone is an online instructor with lots of questions.

Often they're the same questions researchers have been asking for decades. Skimming the vast body of scientific literature devoted to distance education feels like reading a Remembrance of Technologies Past. Once upon a time, the state of the art was snail-mailing VHS cassettes. A 1995 paper touts the pedagogical usefulness of “electronic mail” and heralds the rise of the World Wide Web. By 2009 the discussion had shifted to incorporating Twitter and Facebook into the curriculum.

But some of the issues remain the same, including whether learning outcomes for online education can equal the face-to-face experience, or whether it's merely a secondary alternative — the option you choose when the real thing is not available. One widely cited 2013 analysis of 45 studies comparing the two concluded that students in online classes performed about the same as their in-person counterparts did. There just wasn't much difference, researchers found, between sitting in a lecture hall and sitting in your kitchen with a computer. Other analyses have echoed that finding. There is some evidence that “blended” learning (that is, classes that are offered partially online and partially in-person) might be slightly better than either approach by itself, but the upshot seems to be that sharing the same space with a professor isn't the critical factor in how much students learn.

It's about how the material is delivered, not where, says Stephanie Moore, an assistant professor of education who is the online-learning coordinator at the University of Virginia. “We've con-

cluded that the medium itself isn't what accounts for the difference,” she says. “What we're doing is shifting to questions like ‘What works in what context?’ and trying to better understand what are the variables that contribute to an effective learning experience online, and under what circumstances do those work with

**“Just because 20 people get together in a room doesn't mean that's going to be a great learning experience.”**

particular learners.”

If you're a professor designing a course, figuring out what works in what context requires forethought, and for most there just wasn't time during the rapid transition to online classes brought on by the nationwide shutdown. After colleges shuttered campuses, instructors were forced to improvise solutions — what Moore and several colleagues called “emergency remote teaching” in a recent paper. They argue that the effectiveness of those hastily reinvented courses isn't reflective of what online education can accomplish. “When the wildfire is upon you, you grab what you can and dash,” she says. “And that's very different from the situation where now, with some advanced planning, we can really stop to think about what it is that we want to do.”

As we look ahead to the fall, it appears increasingly likely that many colleges may remain exclusively online. Moore hopes professors will use this time to upgrade their courses from emergency remote teaching to something more effective. When colleagues ask her for advice, she encourages them to start planning for at least some elements of online courses now, whether it's Zoom office hours or



COURTESY OF GEORGE VELETSIANO

George Veletsianos's expertise on online learning has been in considerable demand during the pandemic.

setting up an online discussion board. Making a move toward blended learning is, according to the research, probably an improvement regardless. "If you have to make the pivot back to fully online, you've already started to factor that into the class," she says. "But if you don't have to make that pivot to online, then you're leveraging the best of online with the best classroom instruction."

And, with online classes, planning is paramount. "If you decide to change or adapt on the fly, that just works a lot better in a face-to-face setting," Moore says. With online students it's a different story. "They like it very, very clearly mapped out, well organized, well communicated. So it just puts a lot more pressure on the front end to get things very organized and to make sure that you have a communication plan for your class, not just a content-delivery plan."

Barbara Means agrees. What she noticed during the pandemic were mostly

**There just wasn't much difference, researchers found, between sitting in a lecture hall and sitting in your kitchen with a computer.**

Band-Aid solutions. "You know, it's 'Let's just put up the syllabus and the assignments onto our learning-management

system so that some kind of instruction can continue,” says Means, who is executive director of learning-science research at the nonprofit group Digital Promise and a longtime scholar of online education. “Now there is a little more thought being given to, ‘Well, how are we going to teach, and can we design something that’s better?’”

Toward that end, Means advises professors to seek out whatever teaching-and-learning resources are available at their institutions rather than trying to go it alone. “Many campuses have instructional designers that most faculty never work with,” she says. “This really is a chance to kind of revitalize yourself as an instructor.”

One mistake professors often make when designing online courses is attempting to mirror what happens in a classroom. “When they first started developing automobiles, they tried to replicate a lot of things that were in carriages, because they assumed that everything you have for your horse and buggy, you need something like that in the automobile,” Means says. “And it takes a while for you to think, ‘No, this is actually something different.’”

**“The instructor really needs to insert a sense of who he or she is, their personality, and how that might be related to the concepts they’re teaching.”**

One way it’s different is that the opportunities for casual interaction that might come naturally on a campus — running into a student in a hallway or spending a few minutes after a class clarifying

an assignment — don’t come about as easily in online classes. And, it turns out, those moments matter. A 2019 paper on engaging students online concluded that asking students how they’re doing,

**“When the wildfire is upon you, you grab what you can and dash.”**

how their semester is going, helps foster a deeper sense of connection to the class. “Showing an interest in the life of a student is a powerful strategy to build that bond,” writes the author, Jeffrey Martin, a professor of education at Grand Canyon University. “Through the use of a few simple strategies and tools, online education can be as engaging and meaningful of a process as experienced by the traditional student.”

Means also encourages professors to find ways to make the virtual classroom feel more human. “The instructor really needs to insert a sense of who he or she is, their personality, and how that might be related to the concepts they’re teaching,” she says. “Some personal stories, some jokes. That’s more important to students than you might think.”

In his book, Veletsianos imagines what it might be like for a student enrolling in an online course in the year 2035. What he dreamed up is a program that’s more customized than a typical course now, one that’s tailored to a particular student’s interest and learning styles. Veletsianos hopes that one upside of the current situation will be that instructors begin to conceive of technology not merely as a backup option in a crisis, but as a tool that might make their teaching more creative and effective in the years to come. “I think it’s a great time,” he says, “to start thinking about what higher ed could and should look like after this.”

## RESEARCH TAKEAWAYS

### Online vs. Face-to-Face

Numerous studies have evaluated whether online education lives up to the classroom. A 2018 study compared students in three in-person courses to their online counterparts. The online students had higher grades and reported being more satisfied.

### Dialogue Matters

A 2016 study of 372 online students found that the quality of dialogue – defined as "positive and meaningful interaction" – with the instructor was "one of the strongest predictors of learning outcomes." This echoed an earlier finding that building rapport with students through personal emails and video updates can improve grades and retention.

### Bigger Can Be Better

While some studies suggest that online students tend to be less satisfied with very large courses, there are exceptions. A 2015 study of a highly successful online course at the University of California at San Diego found that outlining "a coherent set of course concepts" and presenting the material in small chunks helped keep students engaged.

### Guidance and Clarity

Multiple studies have pointed to the importance of instructional design in online courses. So what does that mean, specifically? A 2018 study found that students rated discussions structured around clear questions, along with working on "real world" projects, as particularly beneficial. The students also appreciated frequent email reminders.

### Flexibility

A 2019 study tracked online learners over one semester and found that they liked to move at their own pace and preferred to have all assignments and material available from the beginning of the course. Researchers also emphasized the importance of communication and suggested trying to "respond at least once a week to all students."

## SECTION 3



# Voices from the Trenches

W

hat does it take to deliver a college education in unforeseen and unprecedented circumstances? How do you reach and support students, build and sustain communities, and follow through on your mission when you are no longer based on a campus?

Our report concludes with personal accounts from faculty members and some thoughts from a college dean. They reflect on what they learned from the spring semester, what they wish they'd known, and offer advice on how to improve for the fall.

The shift to virtual learning demanded extraordinary agility and flexibility on the part of students, faculty, and administrators — the challenges were numerous, and sizable. As we look ahead, the only thing certain about the fall semester is more uncertainty. Reflection, innovation, preparation, and perseverance will be key. In the words of one faculty member, “Aim for the target. If you miss, try again.”

# 5 Takeaways From My Covid-19 Remote Teaching

Perhaps the most important lesson from academe's rapid shift to remote teaching is that there is no wrong way to salvage your courses during a global emergency.

This semester, if you (a) made a good-faith effort to identify what was essential for your students and (b) set up ways for them to keep moving forward, you did great. From what I've seen and read, faculty members around the world have been doing far more than just putting in a good-faith effort during the Covid-19 crisis. Most of us have moved heaven and earth to ensure some kind of continuity in our students' education, even as we have spent our own days coping with emotional and personal strains we could hardly have imagined mere months ago.

We've spent hours videoconferencing with students. I don't mean robotically delivering preplanned lectures — I mean meeting with students in small groups or one-on-one to talk through problems. We've served as tech support for students (and sometimes for colleagues) on technology that we've just barely learned ourselves. And we've been rolling with the punches as campus policies and plans changed, then changed again.

In short, we did the job we signed up to do — under conditions that none of us signed up for. And, unfortunately, it looks like many of us will be in the same predicament come September.

Nothing about how we will teach in

the fall semester looks certain. And that means faculty members must be ready to teach fully or partially online — either from the start of the semester, or as a sudden pivot if in-person teaching resumes and Covid-19 cases spike again. This

time, however, you won't be going in blind. You have time, as the 2019-20 academic year comes to a close, to think about lessons learned and what you're going to do differently in September if your classroom shifts once again to the virtual realm.

For myself, I'm beginning this process by reflecting on what went well in my own courses during the spring semester, what didn't, and what has surprised even me, a veteran of the educational-technology and online-learning scene.

**Lesson No. 1:**  
**They've gotten a bad rap, but Zoom classes can be**

**rewarding.**

Well before Covid-19, online education had identified one of the most important design choices in constructing our courses: the balance of synchronous (holding class at preset times that students attend together) and asynchronous techniques (organizing activities such as lectures, quizzes, and discussions that students can complete at a time of their choosing).

Perhaps the biggest surprise for me was how often institutions favored one approach over the other this spring, steering their faculty members toward either synchronous or asynchronous instruction.



## COMMENTARY

MICHELLE D. MILLER

There's not really a right or wrong answer to which is better. Each has major upsides and downsides. Some institutions went for one extreme, strongly recommending or requiring that instructors teach "live," while others heavily discouraged real-time courses via Zoom and other such video tools in favor of asynchronous techniques.

Equally surprising were the outcomes this spring from my own synchronous and asynchronous choices as I shifted my courses to remote instruction. Wary of falling into the trap of long, boring Zoom presentations, and worried about students who wouldn't be able to attend required classwide meetings (for all kinds of reasons), I set up only a few Zoom sessions and didn't require attendance. Instead, I organized lots of asynchronous discussion boards and put out a standing offer to help students with any problems, in whatever modalities worked best for them.

But then, my optional sessions were not only well-attended but also unexpectedly rewarding for me and for the students.

Especially given that most of my teaching at this moment happens to be focused on graduate students, the opportunity for social support and maintenance of our group dynamic was a welcome one. I ended up scheduling a few more optional sessions than I had originally planned, and even brought in a guest speaker to help ring out our semester together.

So, yes, synchronous teaching via videoconference can be tiring and occasionally glitchy, and is no panacea. But my live classes turned out much better than I thought they would, which is a lesson I will take into future semesters.

**Lesson No. 2:**  
**Have a pivot plan.**

This summer I will put together all the usual materials — syllabi, readings, quizzes — for my fall in-person courses. But I am also planning to prepare a list of alternatives in case I have to move my courses online or, conversely, if we start online but move back to a physical classroom later in the fall semester.

I don't plan to build a whole backup

course. But I do want to think about all the major elements and how they could be reconstructed or reconceptualized in a virtual classroom, if that proves necessary again.

**Lesson No. 3:**  
**Student goals will take center stage.**

I've always prided myself on being a student-focused teacher. But the process of stripping down a course to its core purpose, in order to adapt it quickly to a virtual classroom, revealed how much further I could go with envisioning students as active creators of their own learning. This experience drove home a point I already knew but maybe needed to be reminded of: What students want to get out of a course ought to be at the center of everything I do.

The contrast between me in regular-teaching mode and me in remote-teaching mode this semester reminded me of how easy it is to lose sight of that aim amid the nitty-gritty of grading policies, assessments, standards, rubrics, and so on. In the future, regardless of modality, I will explicitly invite students in every course I teach to reflect on what they

**In short, we did the job we signed up to do — under conditions that none of us signed up for.**

want to achieve and tell me how I can help make that happen. I plan to rework my syllabi to convey that philosophy upfront, and I'll start the fall semester with an assignment in which students articulate what they want from the course and what kind of support from me would be most helpful.

**Lesson No. 4:**  
**High-stakes assessments are overrated.**

And they're going to recede even further into the background of my teaching,

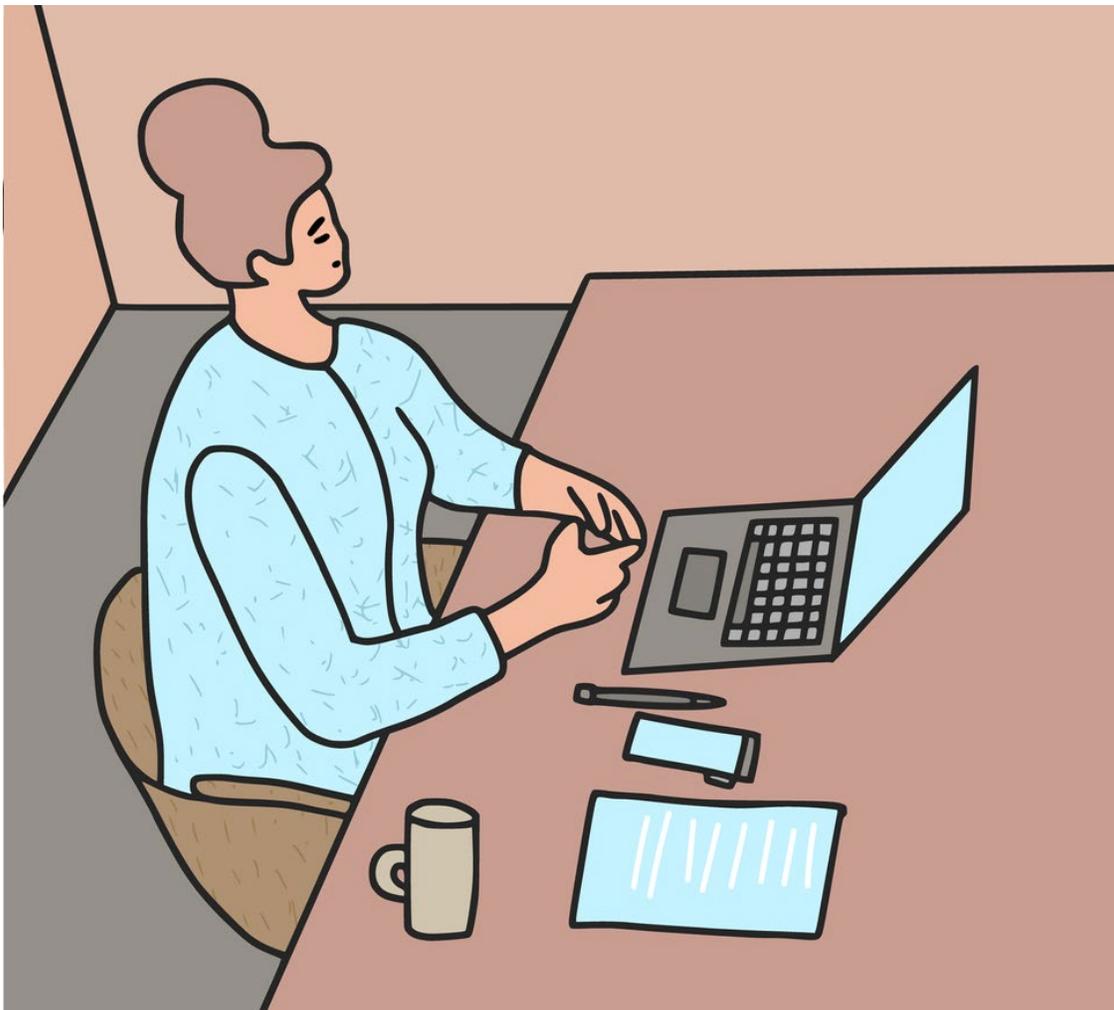
whether in person or online. The details will shake out as I get into the planning process for each course. But one way or another, I'm going to avoid anything that puts students in the position of cramming a lot of work in on a test or a project within a short time frame, just to satisfy a grade requirement. Such heavily weighted assignments turned out to be the worst ones to try to run with integrity in a virtual environment. (They also tend to conflict with Lesson No. 3, where I am trying to shift emphasis off of my own goals for the course and onto students' goals.)

For a while now, teaching experts have advised that students learn best from frequent low-stakes quizzes and other assignments — either in addition to, or in place of, traditional midterms, final exams, and term papers. These experts have

also pointed out that high-stakes tests and papers are a breeding ground for academic dishonesty, and that online exams raise concerns about high-tech remote-proctoring options.

Summer is a good time to re-examine what I'm really trying to accomplish with those big midterms, finals, and projects, and to consider alternative ways to reach the same learning goals, while giving students more control and choice, and reducing the need for intense proctoring.

The alternatives could include assignments that are linked to students' actual interests and engage their attention over a longer period of time — things like creating a series of blog posts, doing a project on real-world problems, or discussing examples of course concepts that show up in the news media. On my end, it could also mean trying



GETTY IMAGES

out different ways to evaluate their work, such as ungrading or specifications grading.

**Lesson No. 5:  
Student mental health will be on my mind.**

The importance of teaching with compassion and care has become a more and more prominent theme in discussions about college pedagogy, and there has never been a better time to listen to what those voices have to say. While it's impossible to predict what will happen this fall, we can safely say that our classes will be filled with students who are struggling to cope.

Campus systems for dealing with student anxiety and depression were already under strain before the Covid-19 crisis, and so I think we will all need to pitch in, just as we did this spring, in ways that we haven't before.

At the same time, we need to respect appropriate professional limitations and boundaries — something that Karen Costa, in her podcast on the subject, terms “scope of practice.” I don't know exactly how my teaching will change to accommodate these mental-health issues, but I know that it will have to. So I'll go into fall with a much higher awareness of trauma-informed pedagogy.

**WHAT INSTITUTIONS MUST DO.**

In the Covid-19 crisis, as in any stressful situation, it's helpful to focus on the things that are within our power to control. But at the same time, I think it is important to avoid framing the goal of a successful fall semester as merely a matter of individual initiative.

Our institutions and our leadership also need to step up, with the same kind of intensive reflection and commitment to adaptability that faculty have demonstrated. And just as we teachers now need, more than ever, to see our students as whole people, our institutions need to recognize that faculty members are not just course-delivering machines, but human beings who are struggling to make sense of, and cope with, all that has happened.

It's also an excellent time for academic leaders to beef up their engagement with

all the great research and thinking that's been going on in the field of higher-education pedagogy. That doesn't just refer to research on online teaching (although that's probably the most critical place to start). It also means getting up to speed on

**I'm going to avoid anything that puts students in the position of cramming a lot of work in on a test or a project within a short time frame, just to satisfy a grade requirement.**

the learning sciences, inclusive pedagogy, and other important frameworks such as universal design for learning.

There are only going to be more critical decisions that come down the pike as we get through this. Grounding campus policies in research will make for better-quality decisions as well as better buy-in for those decisions.

If the Covid-19 crisis ends up making me a better-prepared, more supportive, and more agile teacher, so much the better. And if it spurs our institutions to put more priority on serious collaboration between administrators and faculty members, backed up by the best evidence and research out there — well, we couldn't ask for more. I'm not one to say that this tragedy is full of silver linings. However, I intend to come through it stronger, and I hope our whole profession will, too.

*Michelle D. Miller is a professor of psychological sciences at Northern Arizona University and co-creator of its First Year Learning Initiative. Her latest book is Minds Online: Teaching Effectively With Technology, published by Harvard University Press.*

# 10 Lessons Learned and 10 Goals for the Fall

## Catherine Denial

*professor of American history*  
Knox College

I thought that checking in with my students via Zoom would be a great way for us to feel connected, but it turned out that using Slack (a textual interface) was much better at capturing our personalities, feelings,



Catherine Denial

thoughts, and humor. I had no idea how effective a well-placed emoji or gif could be in communicating empathy or deepening a conversation or just making people laugh. Text felt wooden and unforgiving before — say, in comments on papers — but I’ve learned just how flexible and creative text-based learning can be.

## Sarah Rose Cavanagh

*associate professor of psychology and*  
*associate director of the D’Amour Center for*  
*Teaching Excellence*

Assumption College

Group work and projects and discussions have always been a big part of my teaching, but I think I expected with the pivot online that students would find the requirements to respond to each other’s posts laborious. But, in fact, this seemed to be the part of the remote instruction they put the most energy into. On discussion boards, they went above and beyond replying to each other, thinking carefully about each other’s contributions and encouraging each other. When we’re in the classroom together, I have to plan very carefully to have students engage with other students outside of their natural friend group — using techniques like snowball discussions [students begin talking about an issue with a partner, then join another pair of partners, etc.]. But bringing things online, students spontaneously and seemingly naturally responded to people they had never seemed

to talk to in class much. In my upper-level neuroscience seminar, my students engage in some peer teaching. I was nervous about the added challenge of doing this remotely, but the class really leapt to the challenge and seemed to enjoy leading the charge. With one or two exceptions, this semester I ran everything asynchronously. I had lots of individual student meetings



Sara Rose Cavanagh

over Zoom and met with my larger class for a conclusions/goodbye class, but my “classes” were all minilectures via recorded videos, activities, discussion boards, and assignments. I did this, in large part, because I was hearing from students that their lives were, unsurprisingly, quite disrupted. Some students were sharing com-

puter resources with parents and siblings. Many took jobs — in ERs, grocery stores, pharmacies. A few were sick themselves or had relatives who were sick. I didn't feel like I could expect most of them to attend class at the same time as our on-the-ground class. For the fall, I'll still do the

same general approach (recorded lectures with quizzing and activities interspersed), but I hope to hold some synchronous class times, framed around virtual breakout rooms for students to have small-group discussions together, live Q&A, demonstrations, etc.

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## Jim Clements

*associate professor (teaching) of writing*

**University of Southern California**

**T**here's something ineffable and magical about a classroom. I can do all the same things online — lecture, have discussions, run office hours, collaborate, share work, and so on — but it's less enjoyable, less stimulating, and less effective.

A college is a community, not just a collection of classrooms. What students missed most was friendships, coffee between classes, reading beside other students in the library, study groups, events, Greek life, and everything in between — not just because those things are fun, but because they provide the structure, support, and stimulus to help them excel in their classes. When students crumbled during the online part of the semester (and they did crumble), it was because their college experience existed only on a laptop, and they were all on their own.

What I'll do differently in the fall:

- I'll try to build more of a community for the students. Normally they chit-chat with each other before

and after (or during) class. They vent, talk about their other courses, talk sports and movies — but this is gone now, and it's more of an essential part of the college experience than I realized. Everything's just flat without that camaraderie. So I'm going to give them more time to talk to each other, not just about the course material but also about how they're handling the course material, and about what's going on in their lives. We'll do this in breakout groups, anonymous message boards, and at the beginning and end of class.

- This semester, I recorded a lot of classes because it was impossible to do everything synchronously with students scattered all over the world, and with technical and personal challenges. I'm not going to do this anymore, because, after taking an online course myself, I realized that watching a video of a person talking is an awful way to learn. I've learned that online teaching unconsciously pressures you into using all the technological marvels at your fingertips, but if it's a speech that can be recorded, it can also be written down, and reading, as old-school as it might be, is a much better way to receive information.



Jim Clements

## Viji Sathy

*teaching professor of psychology and neuroscience and administrator in the undergraduate-education office*

**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

**T**here are a lot of lessons learned, but I'd say the single most important lesson was that I had to ask myself early and often: What really matters? What is essential and what is not? ... Honestly, I think the students were shocked that I was making adjustments at all, leave alone that I wanted their input about it.

I distinctly recall one class session where I explained that I wanted to keep the culminating group project in place for the learning objectives it offered. But recognizing their worry about doing group work remotely, the TAs and I revised the template we'd provided. We adjusted an assignment to focus on how the group would work together, what platforms they would use to communicate with one another, how they would share the work, what they would do if a member wasn't responsive, etc. ... We stripped the template of unnecessary sections and left only the pieces that were central to the learning objectives we felt needed practice.

One of the aspects of remote instruction that became essential was an intentional practice of checking in with my students in multiple modes. I started a Remind back-channel where I would share something in the day that put a smile on my face. Students who opted into this channel could reciprocate if they wanted to. I had to get over feeling like I was "broadcasting" about myself (as an introvert, that was very difficult). Rather, I was finding a way to stay connected with students with some of the informal chatter we would have had before class or in office hours, to be humans together in this human experience.

For fall and beyond, I'd like to rethink my assessment practices. For practicality, in my large courses, we were using primarily closed-ended exam questions, timed and proctored. During this switch, I decided that I didn't want students to be tempted to be academically dishonest, so I moved to an

open-book, open-note exam. I gave students multiple days to take the exam, because I wasn't sure if their home environment was conducive to a two- to three-hour stretch of uninterrupted quiet time. Even using a streamlined online grading platform, the exams took much longer to grade. Writing questions that couldn't be Googled took much longer to make. I'd like to think we could sustain this approach semester after semester, but the truth is, there are a finite



**Viji Sathy**

number of ways to ask about certain concepts. Instead, I'd like to move away from a few high-stakes exams to do more periodic assessments.

I'd also like to incorporate more practice with a new question type I introduced this term — the reflection question. I asked: "Reflect on your overall experience in this class by describing an interesting idea that you learned, why it was interesting, and what it tells you about statistics or conducting research." I loved reading the responses.

## Ben Hassman

*lecturer in rhetoric and director of the  
Conversation Center*

**University of Iowa**

**W**hile I've long valued students' relationships with one another, I've found them to be even more important in the spring semester. With the emergency switch, students faced so many deviously subtle challenges — the sort that are hard to name and that might easily cause students to question their ability, their commitment, or their fit. For example, you may feel that not seeing your college friends for a couple weeks shouldn't affect your ability to complete reading quizzes. Barriers to learning can be easily reified as genuine through relationships with fellow students in a normal semester walking between classes, at the lunch table, or waiting for the bus. But without those physical opportunities, it's important



Ben Hassman

for us to build out other ways for them to check themselves against the efforts and interpretations of others, to have an outlet for the natural frustrations and challenges of the learning process.

For the fall, I'm working to bring in more student context and examples. For each discussion, I'm planning to give both a general prompt (for everyone to respond to) and specific discussion-leader prompts that are about connecting course material to examples from students' lives and experiences. While not all of it will be directly related to the Covid-19 response or ensuing social upheaval, those will certainly be available contexts for students to draw on. This will (hopefully) serve the purpose of helping students see each other and build working learning relationships — at the same time as it gives us concrete discussion material for unpacking and examining course concepts (and doing so in terms conceptually accessible to where students are as they enter the now-digital classroom).

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## Fiona Coll

*assistant professor of literature and  
technology*

**State University of New York College at  
Oswego**

**T**he most important single lesson I learned from the emergency switch to remote instruction is that slower is better. I knew we'd have to slow the pace of the course for the second half of our semester, as my students and I were going to need time to adjust to our new social, technological, and cognitive challenges. I removed from each course's syllabus a few readings and activities that weren't going to be possi-

ble in virtual form, thereby making time for more reflection and iterative adaptation.

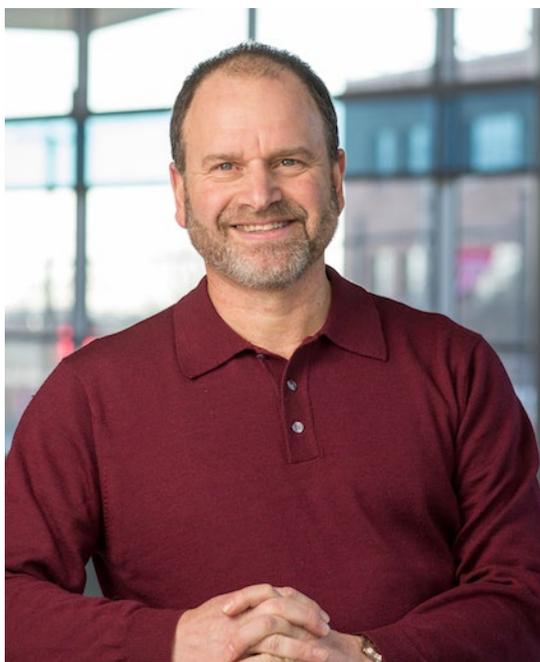
It wasn't entirely a surprise that this reduction in pace resulted in a richer engagement with course materials on everyone's part. What did come as a surprise was the discovery of



Fiona Coll

how overclocked my teaching had quietly become; as I've learned more and more about pedagogy, I've been adding elements to my courses without being as conscientious about removing elements as I might have been. As a result of this realization, I'm going to more purpose-

fully underclock my courses in the fall, whatever the modality of our teaching might be, by cutting back on the readings I assign, focusing the scope of my learning objectives more precisely, and exploring other ways to reduce cognitive load for my students and myself.



David Ingram

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### **David Ingram**

*associate professor of theater*

**Temple University**

I found that leading discussions in synchronous classes was much more difficult than doing so in face-to-face classes, where I had depended on “reading the room” in a way that wasn't possible online. Also, while I think the students liked connecting with each other, Zoom fatigue started to set in as the weeks went on.

For the fall, I plan on planning the discussions much more carefully: alternating synchronous and asynchronous sessions, more consciously aligning each session with course goals, conveying expectations more clearly, and taking care to create more-varied experiences over the semester.

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### **Aimee Pozorski**

*professor of English and director of English graduate studies*

**Central Connecticut State University**

I learned that compassion and flexibility were the most important qualities I could bring to online learning. One of my students was worrying about the health and well-being of his wife and newborn son during the last week in March and the first week in April. Another student was the primary caretaker for her elderly grandparents. I taught with those two students in mind — treating everyone with equal patience. I did a roll call

worth 10 points at the beginning of every week for the first month. I wanted to make sure I still had the attention of students. I asked them to tell me what was going on in their lives. It was a low-stakes assignment to keep them writing and engaged.

I started to question my grading practices. With all of the assignments coming through Blackboard Learn — and my worry about my students' well-being — I found myself responding mostly with encouraging notes about their ideas rather than worrying about the grace of their sentences. I found myself saying, “Yes!” and “Keep going!” a lot.

I learned that, on the one hand, best practices in these kinds of situations

suggest that asynchronous learning is more flexible and democratic. But students longed for face-to-face contact. So I scheduled a lot of Zoom and WebEx and Teams meetings with small groups of students. But those are exhausting. You can see the exhausted appreciation on students' faces.

I went into the experiment thinking students would be very happy, actually, not to have to come to class for a while — to work on their own time and in their own spaces. But they, even more than my colleagues, were devastated by the move to online learning. Even though they are digital natives, they were disoriented and confused in the face of all of these different options. They want to go back to school in the fall, at all costs, which has many of us worried that it will not be safe to do so.

I learned how ironic it is that what this sudden move has shown is that all students crave the seminar-style, community-building learning environments that the liberal-arts colleges offer. But those are the institutions that will be hurt the most with enrollment shortfalls. A state institution with a high commuter population like



Aimee Pozorski

the one I teach at will probably be OK in this new economic reality, but the fact that all of our students, like most of the students around the country, crave face-to-face, boutique-style instruction suggests that we need

to try to save the liberal-arts colleges, too.

Practically speaking, I learned that if I find I can teach in twos — two skills I want students to learn, two platforms for delivering it — then I am on solid ground. If students know where to find the content, know where to upload their assignments, and know how to get ahold of me, they can make do.

But I also learned that in my commitment to being available to dozens and dozens of students, to meet them where they are, there never was a time to shut down for the night, to take a break. I was terrible at setting limits. My notifications on my phone from text, email, GroupMe, WebEx, Teams, Messenger, Zoom, and WhatsApp went off at all hours of the day and night. Even though I saw my students far less face to face, they entered my digital world from all angles, all the time. I had a hard time balancing my commitment to my students' needs and my commitment to myself and my family.

In the fall, what I plan to do differently:

- I am going to be a different kind of grader and consider the big picture of student writing rather than the details of sentences.
- I am going to set boundaries for me and for them regarding how they can reach me and when they can expect me to respond.
- I am going to offer regular and optional Zoom minimeetings — maybe with five students at a time, to keep them engaged, but maybe for no more than an hour or 30 minutes.
- I need to find a way to assign work that students find meaningful and worthwhile — work that has a future and is not just some paper uploaded into a repository waiting for me to grade.
- I will assign more reading aloud. This semester, I had students tape themselves doing dramatic readings and then upload the readings as an MP4 file. I want to find a way to make that collaborative. When we unpack passages together in class, that is when the magic happens. How do you replicate that online?

## Clarissa Sorensen-Unruh

*chemistry instructor*

**Central New Mexico Community College**

**I**n terms of online instruction, I think the key is remembering, at all times, that this is the students' learning journey, not ours. ... When the Covid-19 stay-at-home order was announced, I immediately made a Google form that asked students questions about their situation: What kinds of devices were they using to manage the courses? Where did they access their Wi-Fi? Did their external situation (work, kids) change dramatically



Clarissa Sorensen-Unruh

when the stay-at-home order was issued?

Since summative assessment (i.e., exams) needed to change for every class I taught, I asked them about their pedagogical needs: What kinds of exams did they want to complete to test their learning? Were there alternative assessments they would rather complete than an exam? What kinds of resources did they want me to provide — online office hours? Increased simulations? Alternative textbooks? I analyzed the Google-form results (which were anonymous) and communicated the results back to my students. This Google form then became the basis of my teaching plan for the Covid-19 isolation.

In the fall, I plan to provide more opportunities for students to co-author the class, particularly in how the content is delivered and how the students will be assessed. In the past, I had never dreamed of involving students at the course-design level; after this Covid-19 spring semester, I can't imagine designing the course without the involvement of my students.

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## Erin Whitteck

*assistant director of the Center for Teaching and Learning and assistant teaching professor of chemistry*

**University of Missouri at St. Louis**

**T**he most important lesson I learned about teaching this semester is the need to underscore the difference between equity and equality in our teaching practices. Blanket policies for late assignments, the use of remote proctoring, punitive attendance policies, etc., are typically implemented in the name of fairness. Remote teaching because of Covid-19 has amplified our disparities and the need for more equitable and inclusive practices. For fall 2020 I aim to emphasize in our faculty-development programming that, although this year has been a challenge, it is also an opportunity to reimagine how we can design



Erin Whitteck

learning experiences for our diverse student population by providing flexible paths to achieve a student's definition of success whether that be in online, on-ground, or blended classes.

# How Middle Managers Can Prepare for a More Coherent Fall Semester

**W**ho knew the apocalypse would entail so much paperwork? In fact, any midlevel manager in academic administration probably could have predicted that. And more of it lies ahead, no doubt, as academe plans for the fall semester.

As of this writing we are still, technically, in the first months of the Covid-19 crisis. The middle managers of academe — department chairs, associate deans, directors of centers, deans of academic colleges — can inform, but we do not make the really big decisions, like the one (made what now seems like 1,000 years ago) to transition to remote teaching.

Yet we are responsible for carrying out directives on our turf. Time, effort, patience, and infinite flexibility are required as new challenges in this crisis keep forcing your institution to alter its path. Still, there are things you can do now to aggressively ready your department, office, center, or college for whatever may come in September.

**Draw from the lessons learned — locally, nationally, even internationally.** In this global disaster, we have unlimited access to information and misinformation, to cogent analyses and irrational delusions, to case studies of success and failure. This is the time to collate the best of it and reflect on what it means for your unit.

Especially close to home, collect data, testimonials, examples, and even survey results from the key constituents you serve. What did they learn from the shift to online instruction and remote work? What didn't work well? Which solutions gained traction?

Students, professors, and staff members faced all sorts of tech problems this spring — based on factors like location and income — and institutions responded with various solutions. Within my own universi-

ty, we have been collecting a database of dozens of “fixes” that proved most helpful, such as creating Wi-Fi parking-lot zones (in cooperation with local governments) and distributing hot spots, 100-foot ethernet cables, and laptops. We are also sharing simple solutions to practical issues, such as how to vary virtual backgrounds on Zoom and how to prevent “Zoom bombing.”

At the same time, middle managers should identify individual champions and experts in specific areas who can help one another. Campus IT-staff members have played a crucial role in

getting us through this emergency transition. Equally impressively, many other faculty and staff members, students, and alumni have shared their entrepreneurial solutions. This collaborative spirit extends to hundreds of pop-up and longstanding Facebook pages, blogs, Reddit threads,



## COMMENTARY

DAVID D. PERLMUTTER

and other social-media platforms, where tips, tricks, and hacks are offered without expectation of credit or payment.

You, as an administrator, play a key role in highlighting the best practices for your group, as well as filtering out what to avoid. Gather the wisdom of the experts and of the crowds you work with, redistribute their advice, and then apply those ideas as you prepare for summer and fall. From your vantage point as a leader, you can be, simultaneously, a collator, a curator, and a communicator-in-chief. You can also act as a trusted matchmaker, linking people and groups for mutual aid.

**Plan for different scenarios ... but not too many.** “Paralysis by analysis” is one of the most common problems facing campus administrators in an age of data, dashboards, surveys, and Twitter storms. You get so caught up trying to make a choice among innumerable options that you either make no decision or settle for an inadequate, temporary one.

That is a real danger for institutions as a whole, let alone particular departments and graduate programs, because we face some inherently contradictory forces in this crisis. Fall enrollment, for example: Are you worried about it? I am. There are two major responses we are hearing from parents, registrars, admissions officers, and recruiters:

- Parents are skeptical about paying “full freight” tuition for an online semester that they doubt can provide even an approximation of the value of a residential-college experience and face-to-face pedagogy.
- Parents are extremely concerned that a premature “back to normal” scenario with everyone on campus again in September is a threat to the safety and health of their children.

Those feelings and opinions are in direct opposition but are equally authentic and rational. As a result, colleges and universities are looking at myriad scenarios for the fall term. In your own planning as a middle manager — and this is crucial —

don’t waste your time, money, and attention (and everyone else’s) by coming up with 20 plans for your unit.

## Parents are skeptical about paying “full freight” tuition for an online semester that they doubt can provide even an approximation of the value of a residential-college experience and face-to-face pedagogy.

Basically, one of three things is going to happen in September:

- Your institution will try to return to the status quo, based on a general flattening of the Covid-19 curve in your local city and state.
- Your campus may opt for a hybrid solution, such as a split semester combining online and in-person courses. Or perhaps it will allow only first-year and graduate students on the campus.
- Or you may be 100-percent online for everything — research, teaching, service, administration — as we essentially are now.

As the spring semester comes to a close, it looks as if a majority of institutions will aim for the hybrid option. Focus your time and your team’s planning skills on those three options, and the innumerable details required to carry out each one in whole or in part.

For instance, in academe’s rushed shift to remote teaching, we handled the transition well in some classes but not others. Some courses were well suited to online delivery, and some weren’t. Now is the time for you, your colleagues, and faculty and staff members to systematically identify

(1) which courses in your program can be taught online this fall, and by whom, with minimal changes or training; (2) which classes, with adequate preparation, could be taught online at a high level of quality; and (3) which classes just won't work online with the team you have, and would require in-person teaching. Part of the decision about any face-to-face courses will involve how you maximize social-distancing guidelines in your classrooms, labs, and studios.

**Identify the essentials.** This year, along with my duties as dean, I am serving as president of one of our field's professional societies. Together with the other leaders of that association, I am trying to make parallel decisions about how to pull off a high-quality virtual conference. What both experiences have reinforced is the urgency of setting absolute priorities for the fall term.

Of course, what makes all of this much worse is that American higher education has suffered a tremendous budget hit, which may well worsen in the months ahead. Many institutions are projecting a steep drop in the number of (or even the complete absence of) international students on their campuses. We can also anticipate that many domestic parents will want, as one said to me, "to be able to drive less than an hour to pluck my daughter out of the dorm." Thus larger states, such as Texas, will witness a reluctance among parents to send their kids to far-flung campuses.

In your planning, then, you can expect a severely curtailed budget. Working with your constituencies, you must identify not only the areas that can be trimmed but also the areas in which to redirect money to core missions.

Taking those trends into account, my own media-and-communication college will be cutting its budget in response to university and state shortfalls. But we are also looking at increasing our investment in a branch-campus program in central Texas, a six-hour drive from our main campus. Additionally, we are deferring some major renovations of lab facilities to spend more on software and hardware

that will support remote teaching and research. Finally, to improve our online teaching and research this fall, we are identifying training modules and programs that have gotten strong reviews. Cutting and investing are not mutually exclusive actions.

**Consider morale, not just tech fixes and mission outcomes.** People are dying or getting sick from Covid-19. A great many others are losing their jobs and being economically displaced, for some indefinite time to come. Quite a few higher-education institutions — such as small liberal-arts colleges that were already struggling with low enrollments and small endowments — are facing an existential crisis.

It is all too easy to be numbed by the global scale of problems and obsessed by technical details at the local level.

Yet, as I have stated before in the Admin 101 series, good academic leaders care about the morale and the wellness of individuals, and not just the aggregate metrics and the how-to fix-its. As a department chair, graduate-program director, associate dean, or dean, you cannot be responsible for everybody, but you can take into account the spirit of your team, beyond the appropriate scheduling of classes, funding of training programs, and availability of cable adapters.

**We can also anticipate that many domestic parents will want, as one said to me, "to be able to drive less than an hour to pluck my daughter out of the dorm."**

So as you plan for the fall, especially for the hybrid scenario, set aside time to ponder, discuss, and lay out some ways to improve the mood and the human connectedness of the constituencies you serve.

Our college, for example, has always had a culture committee. Its members are now working on ways for people in the college to socialize and support one another — outside of the world of research, teaching, and service.

Across the country, colleagues are raising morale with remote dinners, recipe sharing, virtual-background contests, parking-lot meet-ups for movie screenings, and scores of other ideas. You, as a leader, should encourage the exploration of what might work for your group.

Keeping up morale also means advocating for employees whose individual problems require policy exceptions. For instance, if a faculty member's ailing mother lives 1,000 miles away, perhaps your "work from home" rules for this summer and fall can be adjusted to "work from wherever you need to be."

Likewise, encourage humane outreach among colleagues, and practice what you preach. This is already happening: I heard about a young single faculty member who is regularly walking the dogs of a retired professor — a companionship win-win-win for all of them.

Across higher education this spring, we've seen great compassion and tolerance for the challenges that academe has faced in moving to remote work and instruction. But proceeding by trial and error assumes that people actually try to learn from their errors. Come fall, the reality is that our stakeholders — students, donors, grant agencies, parents and guardians, accreditors, state lawmakers — will want to see improvements and will assume high standards of execution. For instance, most accrediting organizations frown on "correspondence courses," which online education — done badly — can become. And the Americans With Disabilities Act and its modern federal

interpretations still very much matter.

You, as a middle manager, will be held accountable for what goes wrong in your program's curriculum and instruction in the fall semester.

Yes, a few months is not adequate time to retool any industry, and it is difficult to ramp up your game when you have fewer dollars and frozen hiring. However, I believe we can meet both public and private expectations with the innate creativity,

**Come fall, the reality is that our stakeholders — students, donors, grant agencies, parents and guardians, accreditors, state lawmakers — will want to see improvements and will assume high standards of execution.**

resourcefulness, and professional pride of campus administrators, faculty members, and staff members.

The key: Your planning to grapple with the narrow range of big-picture options and attend to the corresponding small details must begin now.

*David D. Perlmutter is a professor in and dean of the College of Media & Communication at Texas Tech University and an executive coach for hospitals and universities. He writes the Admin 101 advice column for The Chronicle.*

# RESOURCES

EDUCAUSE

QUALITY MATTERS



ONLINE LEARNING  
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COURTESY OF ONLINE LEARNING CONSORTIUM

A presenter from Carolina Coastal U. describes best practices in online teaching at a workshop offered by the Online Learning Consortium.

# OUTSOURCING TRAINING

By BETH MCMURTRIE

**M**ost colleges have limited capacity to train faculty members to design and teach online or hybrid courses, so some are turning to outside organizations for help. Here are a few of the main groups that offer training and support — both paid and free — for individual instructors and for institutions.

The **Online Learning Consortium** offers workshops, webinars, and other training through its Institute for Professional Development, as well as a number of free resources on its website. It also offers customized consulting for colleges that want to improve their online learning programs.

One of the more popular offerings this spring, says Angela Gunder, vice president for online learning, is a train-the-trainer

model, to help colleges train their instructional designers and other staff who support professors as they design online courses. For colleges with very limited resources, OLC will help connect them with peers at other colleges to provide support. It recently received a \$50,000 grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to provide affordable professional development to minority-serving institutions as they move to online instruction during the pandemic.

**Educause** supports faculty members, instructional designers, academic-technology professionals, and others through dozens of specialized listservs where people share advice and seek support, says Malcolm Brown, director of learning initiatives. It also shares the instructional-continuity plans of var-

ious colleges and provides resources for online course development and online teaching strategies.

**Quality Matters** runs a nationally recognized quality-assurance program for instructors who design online courses. To manage the high demand brought about by the shift to remote learning, the organization created a shorter version of its flagship program, called “New to Online Teaching,” which focuses on best practices in course design and effective online teaching. Instructors can take courses on their own, or institutions can sign up groups of faculty members, says Deb Adair, executive director.

The **Association of College and University Educators** trains and credentials faculty members in the use of evidence-based teaching practices through a 25-module training program. A version of the course designed around effective online teaching was released in June. ACUE also offers other options, including microcredentials — short courses for which faculty members can sign up individually or in groups; specialized training for groups of faculty members from a particular college, in collaboration with campus facilitators; and free online resources, including an online-teaching toolkit and webinars on effective online instruction.

Tricia Russ, executive director of partnerships, says the pandemic has revealed how little training instructors typically receive on how to teach, whether online or in person. “Every day on most campuses, there is someone who is a discipline expert put into a classroom with zero preparation to teach,” she says. “This helps us remember that.”

**The National Council for Online Education** provides research and evidence-based practices for online learning. It is a partnership among several groups: the Online Learning Consortium, Quality Matters, the Wiche Cooperative for Educational Technologies, and the University Professional and Continuing Education Association.

## Outside Resources

There’s another kind of outsourcing that colleges may want to consider: using courses and course material created by others. These include:

- **Virtual laboratories.** Created by companies like Labster and nonprofit collaboratives like ChemCollective, these products can be incorporated into online science courses for situations in which students can’t do hands-on lab work on campus.
- **Open-educational resources.** These digital materials are, by definition, freely available online and adaptable to the needs of an instructor or a course. They can be particularly useful in large gateway or other introductory courses, and offer alternatives to costly textbooks. Merlot, OpenStax and OER Commons are nonprofit sources of such materials.
- **Online courses.** These come in many forms, such as StraighterLine, which offers low-cost general education courses, and Coursera, an online MOOC platform. Coursera recently created a search engine called CourseMatch, through which colleges can match their needs with the platform’s offerings. Colleges with limited capacity to offer online courses may want to consider whether to allow students to take courses for credit through such providers.

Among institutions already planning for the fall, 73 percent are adding or using virtual labs, 72 percent are using collaboration applications, and 36 percent are using digital or virtual studios, according to an Educause poll.

There are, obviously, an enormous and growing number of virtual educational resources available to colleges, some of which are free. And many companies, both in the spirit of goodwill and in hopes of recruiting future customers, offered free or discounted services this spring. (Educause created a Google spreadsheet to help sort through some of these offers.)

Academic leaders should work with their teaching and learning centers, academic technologists, and IT staff to determine which options might make sense for their needs.

## FURTHER READING

[\*An Urgency of Teachers\*](#), by Sean Michael Morris and Jesse Stommel, Hybrid Pedagogy Inc., 2018

[“5 Low-Tech, Time-Saving Ways to Teach Online During Covid-19,”](#) by Flower Darby, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 14, 2020

[“8 Ways to be More Inclusive in Your Zoom Teaching,”](#) by Kelly A. Hogan and Viji Sathy, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 8, 2020

[“How to Help Struggling Students Succeed Online,”](#) by Beth McMurtrie, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 26, 2020

[\*Hybrid-Flexible Course Design: Implementing Student-Directed Hybrid Classes\*](#), by Brian J. Beatty, EdTech Books, 2019

[“Let’s Add Compassion to our Online Curriculum,”](#) by Karen J. Head, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 31, 2020

[\*99 Tips for Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos\*](#), by Karen Costa, Stylus Publishing, 2020

[“6 Steps to Prepare for an Online Fall Semester,”](#) by Jack Villasenor, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 8, 2020

[\*Teaching Online: A Guide to Theory, Research, and Practice\*](#), by Claire Major, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015

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[“Zoomed Out’: Why ‘Live’ Teaching Isn’t Always the Best,”](#) by Beckie Supiano, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 2, 2020



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Beth McMurtrie** covers innovation in teaching and the future of learning as a senior writer. She has written about a range of topics for *The Chronicle* over the past 20 years, including scholarship, entrepreneurship, economic divides, campus culture, diversity, and religion. For eight years she was *The Chronicle's* international editor, directing coverage of foreign higher education and the global activities of U.S. institutions. She is the author of "The Future of Learning: How Colleges Can Transform the Educational Experience" and "Reforming Gen Ed: Strategies for Success on Your Campus" from Chronicle Intelligence.



**Beckie Supiano** covers teaching, learning, and the human interactions that shape them. A senior writer, she co-writes Teaching, *The Chronicle's* weekly newsletter devoted to those issues. Supiano joined *The Chronicle* in 2008 and previously covered college affordability. She grew up in Ann Arbor, Mich., and lives in Florida. She is the author of "The Creativity Challenge: Teaching Students to Think Outside the Box," from Chronicle Intelligence.

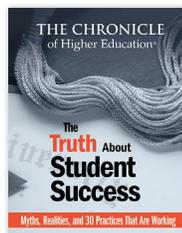
**Tom Bartlett** is a senior writer covering social science, the humanities, and other topics. He's the recipient, with Nell Gluckman, of the 2018 Society of Professional Journalists award for national magazine investigative reporting. His articles have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *WIRED*, *The New York Times*, *Politico*, *Texas Monthly*, and other publications..

A portion of this report previously appeared in *The Chronicle*.

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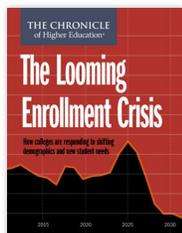


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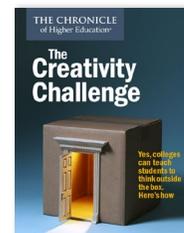


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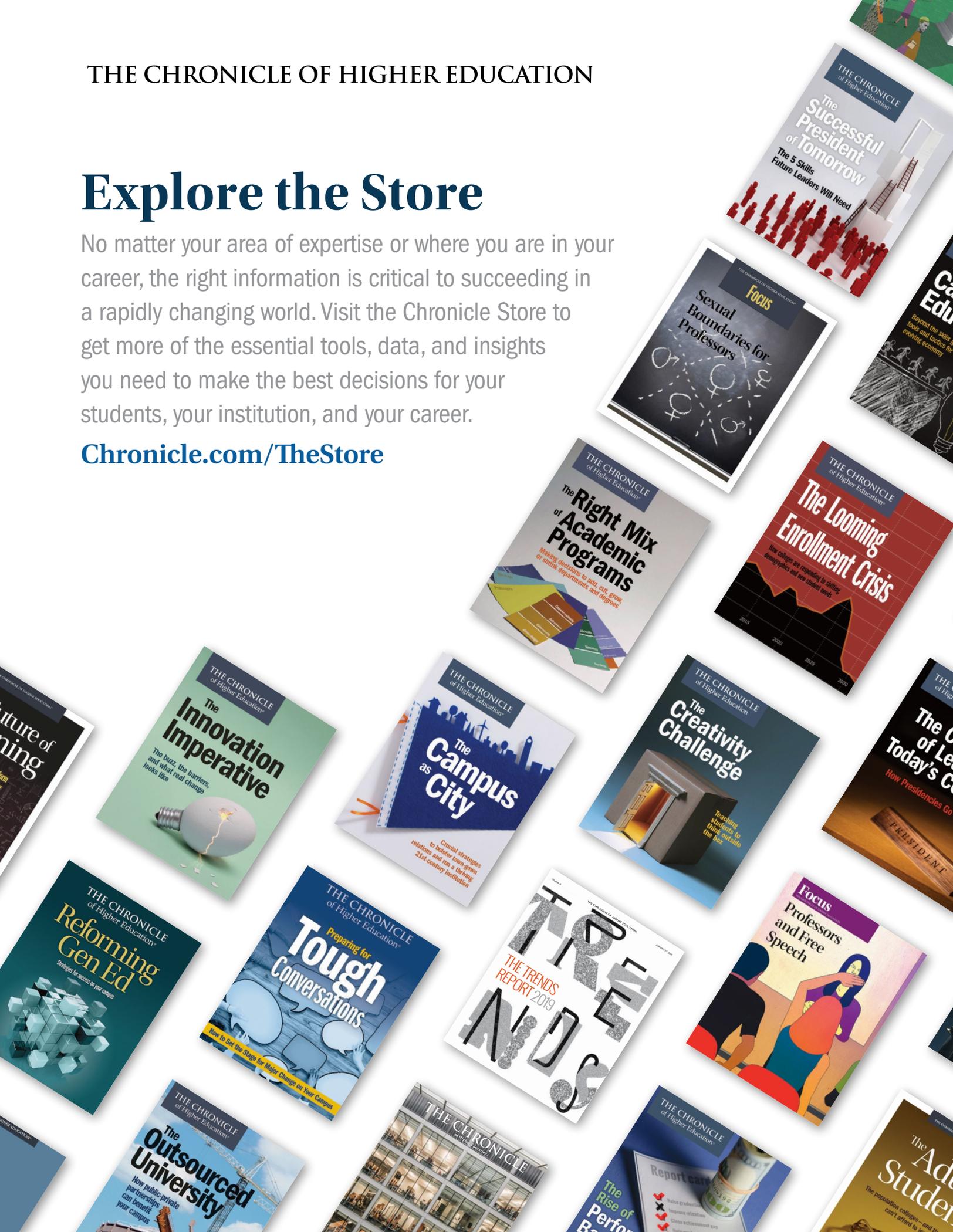
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