A Resource Guide for Departmental Conversation and Contingency Planning

Part I: Ensuring Our Students are Learning

The COVID-19 crisis required us to embrace a “just keep teaching” approach. Our call as educators elevates us to more ambitious aims, particularly as we consider enrollment concerns for the fall semester. As an institution, we will be challenged to make the case to both prospective and current students about the unique value of a North Central education. This resource guide has been created to inform departmental contingency planning for any future campus closures and to facilitate conversation about how we can work individually and collectively to achieve our highest aspirations.

Part I: We crave rich, integrative teaching and learning experiences. Part II: We want our students to be healthy and whole. Part III: We aspire to deeply engage our students in disciplinary training within the context of a broad, liberal arts education; encouraging them to participate in co-curricular and high-impact experiences; and mentoring them as they prepare for life after North Central. What is your elevator pitch about the distinct aspects of the College, your department, and your courses?

Best Practices for Utilizing Blackboard

Academic freedom is at the heart of CAFÉ’s approach to faculty development. As Reese and Poritz argue in their 2016 book *Education is Not an App: The Future of University Teaching in the Internet Age*, educational technology should be served buffet style: “Everyone eats what they want or perhaps chooses not to eat at all. It is the administration’s job to lay out the table rather than to force the available offerings down anyone’s throat” (Reese, 2019). CAFÉ also champions evidence-informed practices and it is in that spirit that we offer this set of best practices.

Expanding our institutional use of Blackboard for traditional face-to-face courses will better prepare us for situations that require remote instruction, such as professional travel, instructor illness, or campus closures for public health, weather, or power outage. Research shows that standardizing the student experience with the learning management system (LMS) also promotes student success (Schaffhauser, 2016; Firat, 2016). Several studies examining college students’ technology preferences have shown that nearly all students use an LMS and students consistently identify this as one of the most important instructional technologies for their academic success (Brooks, 2016; Dahlstrom, Walker, & Dziuban, 2013). Students enrolled in courses that utilized the grade center were more likely to achieve higher grades compared to courses that did not (Fritz, 2016). “The biggest predictor of student achievement (based on their use of a LMS) is not the amount of time they spend working with course content; nor is it how long they spend...
taking assessments or participating in discussion forums. It’s how frequently they check their grades online” (Schaffhauser, 2016). Based on the findings that effective course design practices within the LMS have a positive influence on student learning (Fritz and Whitmer, 2017), we recommend the following strategies to instructors:

- One week before the course begins:
  - Have the syllabus completed and course material uploaded to Blackboard;
  - Make the course available;
  - Send a welcome email to the students.

- Have a clear Welcome Page including:
  - a course description;
  - key learning objectives;
  - a photo and text bio of you;
  - an introductory video message from you or full course tour from you;
  - personalized course banner.

- Share contact information so that students know the best way to reach you (e.g., phone, email, discussion forum, office hours, video chat).

- Use Announcements to keep students informed about time sensitive information critical to course success.

- Keep the navigation bar simple, intuitive, and familiar to students (Welcome-Start Here, Announcements, Syllabus, Learning Modules, Discussion Board, My Grades, Email, Online Meetings, Resources) and consider providing a short video tour of the class, using a screen capture tool such as Loom or Camtasia. Delete any unused menu items.

- Inform students clearly about any extra technology or software they will need for the course and provide links to instructions.

- All handouts should be in a native electronic form (word document, PPT document, or a PDF made directly from one of these). Scanned images from a paper original are incompatible with accessibility software. As a quick test, if you cannot use your mouse to select a few words of text in the document, it is probably a scanned image.

- Set expectations for communicating in discussion board postings (10 Tips for effective online discussions) and provide discussion board tips for students.

- Grades should be posted so that students can track their progression in the course.
Deliver at least one course meeting via remote delivery in the first two weeks of instruction in Fall 2020 to allow yourself and your students to test remote accessibility.

On a bi-weekly basis, check the login and activity statistics of your students (Blackboard Retention Center) and file an early alert if you have any concerns.

Check out Blackboard’s Exemplary Course rubric to self-assess whether you have created an effective and engaging online learning environment (Video Overview).

Self-Assessment of Your Online Instruction

The transition to emergency remote instruction was stressful and overwhelming for many instructors. As we tell our students, it is these disequilibrating experiences and the inevitable failures that promote the greatest growth. Please use the questions below to identify areas where you may need additional support.

Did you have access to the technology you needed?
- Access to a dependable computer?
- Reliable WIFI?
- Equipment to create videos?
- A cloud storage system (Box) for anywhere file access?

Compared to the first half (face-to-face) portion of the spring semester, how successful were you in the second half with…
- online content delivery?
- interacting with students?
- having quizzes, tests and other assessments online?
- delivering content in multiple forms to support different types of learners? (e.g. videotaped short lectures with captions and text notes, examples or case studies to illustrate content, video clips to supplement lessons)
- projecting your social presence online?

Which works better for you, synchronous or asynchronous (everyone works differently, and these different modes have advantages and disadvantages).? When did you experience moments of connection with students and how can you build on those?

What can you do to foster greater social connection among students?

What were the benefits and drawbacks to your virtual office hours?
• What are the three biggest challenges you see in online teaching and learning?

Enhancing Online Learning Sessions

Emergency remote teaching should not be conflated with effective online learning, which is the result of careful instructional planning and design that has been driven by evidence-informed practices, combined with a systematic model assessment and improvement.

Research on types of interaction—which includes student–content, student–student, and student–learner—is one of the more robust bodies of research in online learning. In short, it shows that the presence of each of these types of interaction, when meaningfully integrated, increases the learning outcomes. Thus, careful planning for online learning includes not just identifying the content to cover but also carefully tending to how you’re going to support different types of interactions that are important to the learning process. This approach recognizes learning as both a social and a cognitive process, not merely a matter of information transmission. (Hodges, Moore, Lokee, and Bond, 2020).

We hope that faculty will continue to take pedagogical risks and to deepen their understanding of online learning. Here are some suggestions for enhancing online learning sessions.

• Give students a weekly calendar of suggested activities beyond assignment due dates (e.g., recommended start dates for readings, beginning dates for working group projects, etc.) or post a weekly overview video on Blackboard, providing encouragement and a preview of what is coming up.

• Express your enthusiasm for the course through your tone, as well as through the content you include when making posts or giving feedback (Hansen, 2017)

• As an alternative to text-based Blackboard Discussion boards, consider having students engage in video discussions using free tools like FlipGrid to increase social and teaching presence as well as the overall sense of community in your course (Clark, Strudler & Grove, 2015).

• Flip your classroom by making a video series of your lectures.
  o Use a tool like Loom that includes your image as you give a presentation because students can connect better when they can see you.
  o Create a collection of 10-minute micro-lectures on a topic (Hsin & Cigas, 2013).
  o Post the video to MS Stream to automatically generate a transcript and/or provide the PPT slides and share your notes for students to review.
Trying to be perfect will make you more tense and less engaging. Relax and expect some mistakes.

- Live online sessions (using Collaborate, Zoom, etc.) are best used for interacting with students (e.g., answering questions, working through problems or examples) rather than trying to deliver a lecture.
  - Expect a lot of student connection problems for the first live session, so do one session that is just an overview of the course or something casual but still make attendance mandatory. This lets you address the mechanical problems so that later sessions can focus on content and interactivity.
  - If the class is large (more than about 8 students), do not turn on their mics and cameras. Let them use the chat function to ask questions. It is easier to manage the session this way.
  - Do not watch a video together via live sessions. Link to the video, let the students watch on their own time, then have a discussion board about it or host a synchronous session to discuss the video.
  - Accommodate students who cannot attend by recording sessions and give an equivalent assignment related to watching it.
  - Build reflection or summary assignments around the live sessions.

- Take virtual field trips (tour the website of a national research facility, or a museum, or a national park). Deborah Raines provides an overview of how she implements virtual field trips in her nursing courses. Or have virtual guest lecturers.

- You do not have to replace all the face-to-face sessions with synchronous web meetings; try engaging students in asynchronous activities instead. Primarily synchronous sessions may exacerbate equity issues as it disadvantages students who might not have access to high-speed internet or who use a shared device at home.

Taking your own technology enhanced teaching to the next level will also help scale up our institutional capacity for high-quality online learning.

Motivating Students to Participate Remotely

If you struggled to motivate your students to participate remotely, turn to your colleagues and to the literature for effective engagement strategies. “Factors associated with student persistence in an online program include satisfaction with online learning, a sense of belonging to the learning community, motivation, peer, and family support, time management skills, and increased communication with the instructor” (Hart, 2012).

- Transmit your enthusiasm (See Bethany Hansen’s post for inspiration).
• Use polls and group questions to prompt interaction every 5-7 minutes (Hartwell, 2017).

• Shout out to students who do a good job on a discussion post and encourage others to participate. Call out a few students for “Best Picks of the Week”, explaining what made their links so effective. Use badges to Send Praise in MS TEAMS.

• Build a class photo gallery with a tool like Padlet by assigning students to locate social media pictures or postings and explain the connections to the class topics.

• Use the online video resources of Oestlerle Library and Films On Demand.

• Teach by testing because the act of answering questions can improve retention (Lang, 2014). Give students quizzes with multiple attempts allowed and encourage them to collaborate. Use the Challenge mode of Kahoot to have asynchronous quiz contests.

Professional Development Support
• Pair up with a colleague to review each other’s classes and share approaches to online teaching and learning.

• Departments can develop a shared resource bank of well-crafted learning modules.

• Remember that CAFÉ is here to support your work.
  o Explore the resources we have posted in MS TEAMS.
  o Complete our self-paced Online Pedagogy Institute over the summer. To enroll send an email to CAFÉ@noctrl.edu.
  o Chairs should contact CAFÉ if they are interested in setting up departmental trainings to expand faculty understanding of and comfort with various remote learning technologies.
  o Share your success stories with us so that we can spotlight and amplify the impact of your work!
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Part II: Ensuring Our Students are Thriving

The financial stressors and social isolation caused by the coronavirus outbreak have depleted our students' cognitive resources for learning. According to the Gallup Poll, the percentage of U.S. adults who evaluate their lives well enough to be considered “thriving” has dropped to 48.8%, the lowest level since 2008. How can instructors and departments help ensure that our students are given the opportunities and the support they need to flourish under these difficult circumstances?

Understand the Scope and Prevalence of Stressors

Strategies for Supporting All Students

- **Bonner, A. (2020).** Mindfulness in the (Online) Classroom. Faculty Focus.
  - “I believe taking time to engage with your students, as difficult as that may seem through blank screens and muted audios, is absolutely necessary, particularly when emergency remote teaching. … And in the middle of what might be the most stressful time in our life, I don’t think we are sacrificing anything by showing empathy—even if that means flexibility—to our students.”

  - “Remember that the most vulnerable students are often the most reluctant to ask for help—usually because of how they’ve been (mis)treated when asking for help in the past. Recognize that what might seem like a lack of motivation or effort (e.g., not showing up for class meetings, not completing assignments) might actually be a silent signal of struggle.”

  - “The importance of authentic, caring mentors to drive student wellbeing has never been more evident. They will be angry, scared and struggling to feel safe. The world is full of messaging about what's wrong, and students are struggling to see what's right, not simply in the world at large, but in themselves, too. This modest shift in your mindset is vital to help shift your students' mindsets, too.”

  - One of Bayne’s five guiding principles is: “The humane option is the best option. We are going to prioritize supporting each other as humans.”

- **The Steve Fund**
  - “As our nation confronts this public health crisis, The Steve Fund is sharing information and tips to help young people and their caregivers cope and remain grounded in the midst of the challenge that coronavirus presents to our…society.”

- **CAST: UDL ON CAMPUS**
  - “Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone—not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs.”
Reflections on Collective Grief and Trauma Teaching in Higher Ed by T. Wynard

- Resources providing from experiencing 9/11 and teaching during the 2008 NIU shooting have enduring relevance and exemplify trauma informed practices.
  - Northern Illinois University Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center. Teaching in Times of Crisis.
  - University of Missouri-St. Louis Center for Teaching. Responding to the Virginia Tech Tragedy.

- Check-in activities are important to do with faculty and students. Here is one example that can be tailored to your audience. Using a platform like Blackboard, AnswerGarden, or Polleverywhere, participants can highlight something positive, an area where they can use more support, and new ideas that have blossomed.

- It is essential for professors to provide a blend of pedagogical methods so secondary exhaustion from the transition to remote learning and teaching is minimized. This article offers six ways to find balance and connection in virtual meetings: 1) ground attention before starting; 2) greet others with your full attention; 3) choose speaker view; 4) resist multitasking; 5) take measured breaks; 6) remember that this new place “is both better than absence … and not quite as resonant as presence.”

- Teaching in Trauma Resources
  - Excellent Webinar on Trauma-Informed Pedagogy by Mays Imad, the Coordinator of the Teaching & Learning Center at Pima Community College
  - There are many resources that are available for all professors and teachers, which provide strong action steps and a research foundation for trauma informed practices in the classroom.


Newhouse, K. (2020) Four Core Priorities for Trauma-Informed Distance Learning.
The Importance of Self-Care

While we care for others, we must not overlook the importance of our own well-being.

- **Cohan, Deborah J. (2019).** Self-Care for the New Year. *Inside Higher Ed.* January 17.
  - “Take a 10-minute sabbatical every day. Reflect on what truly sustains you. Honor the power of sacred solitude and silence. Constantly being tethered to devices can be draining. Get into nature, connect to the world beyond yourself and your work, and relish in wonder and hope.”

  - Practicing Gratitude and Positive Thinking: People who are consistently grateful have been found to be happier, and more energetic, hopeful, helpful, empathetic, forgiving, and less materialistic and less likely to be depressed, anxious, lonely…”

  - “Towery defines self-care as any act or habit that promotes sanity, rejuvenation and/or joy. …he defines the ‘three pillars of self-care’ as: Getting adequate sleep; Engaging in vigorous physical activity multiple times per week; Developing a daily meditation practice.”

- **Suttie, J. (2020).** How to Keep the Greater Good in Mind During the Coronavirus Outbreak. Greater Good Magazine. March 10.
  - “When we hear stories of [heroes], we feel what is called moral elevation—a warm feeling inside that inspires us, fueling optimism and a desire to act altruistically ourselves. While the temptation might be to focus on fear and everything going wrong, we can redirect our attention to those who are doing the right thing, which will lead us to be better citizens ourselves.”
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Part III: Ensuring Our Students are Engaging

The literature on campus community building highlights the significance of transitions and the tendency for transitions to make all of us, and students in particular, feel marginal. To combat feelings of marginality, students must feel noticed, cared for, appreciated, and recognized (Schlossberg 1989, Strayhorn 2019). This is particularly challenging in the remote learning environment, and the ideas below are intended to offer suggestions to overcome students’ feelings of marginality through the cultivation of relationships, rituals, belonging, and academically-focused student engagement.

Relationships

- Consider recruiting a student who performed well in a previous iteration of your course to serve as a course preceptor. A preceptor is an apprentice, of sorts, working alongside a professor and participating in the management and delivery of a course. Inviting a strong student to serve as a preceptor is a great way to engage and challenge that student, as well as offer a significant peer resource to the students in the course. In the remote learning environment, preceptors can host virtual tutoring or review sessions, as well as communicate with students about their online experiences. Students recruited to serve as preceptors will need to register for LEAD 360 and can get permission to do so by contacting the Associate Dean for Engaged Learning.

- Consider ways that students can share coursework experiences at home. For example, ask students to watch a TED talk with a family member and discuss the ideas presented together.

- Consider communicating occasionally during the summer via Blackboard with your spring semester students, sending them news articles and other happenings in the world that connect with course content.

- If you are a faculty advisor for a co-curricular student organization, encourage your student leaders to make plans to engage new students when classes begin in the fall and connect with those student leaders during the summer months.

Rituals

Weekly rituals can be created at the course-level or the department-level. Here are some ideas:

- Try to follow a consistent pattern every week in terms of the required components of the course.
• Pose a fun question to celebrate the end of each week in a discussion forum or other online space for students to engage: What’s the most boring thing that happened to you this week? Post a picture of your pet or a pet you would like to have. Post a discipline-specific joke.
• Consider sending information out to students on a set day each week. This could be a newsletter or an announcement from a departmental Blackboard page.

**Belonging to the College Community**
Consider how each of your courses might connect with the broader North Central student experience. Some examples:
• Your students could conduct research projects that incorporate data collection through the online resources of the College Archives.
• Students might engage in a community-based research project that benefits a campus organization or unit. For example, your students could partner with the Student Involvement Office to gather data from their peers that would be useful for that office.
• Invite a North Central alum to speak to your students about their career trajectory.

**Belonging to the Broader World**
How do we foster conversations about civic engagement and the public good in the midst of a global pandemic?
• Draw on the Center for Civic Reflection’s discussion plans, facilitator summaries and additional resources available to engage students in reflective dialogue on a range of topics with the current crisis as one source of experience.
• Incorporate an assignment or facilitate a discussion about “advancing democracy through political institutions, organizations, and activities” by engaging with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge.
• Faculty in your department could develop reflection questions for students in your courses to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 health crisis on various community partners and stakeholders. Faculty members teaching interdisciplinary courses, or in partnership with faculty members in other departments, could have students research and write about the impact of this public health crisis from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

**Engagement: Course-Based High-Impact Practices**
Student engagement is not simply about students getting involved in campus life. George Kuh (2009) defines engagement as “the time and effort that students devote to activities
that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (p. 683). As faculty members, we guide students into particular experiences that we believe will serve them well given their intellectual, disciplinary, and personal goals.

Community Engaged Learning Courses

- If you are teaching a course that incorporates Community Engaged Learning (CEL), consider virtual engagement or project-based work.
  - If wishing to pursue virtual engagement, the community partner must be contacted to assess whether they have the capacity to support CEL work at this time. Some partners may be shutting down completely, have limited or no technology access, or be working with a population who are not interested in engaging virtually.
  - Examples of what virtual engagement could look like:
    - Submit art to create get well cards for COVID-19 patients
    - Phone or web-based meetings with agency team members, those being served by the organization, or others in the community
    - Work with community partner staff to share videos or use technology to continue visits with residents or patients of retirement home facilities
  - Project-based work is a bit more flexible and puts less strain on the community partner. It involves content creation and/or research. This type of work can be in response to the directly-communicated needs of a community partner or structured by the faculty member in situations where the partnership must end abruptly. In the latter case, faculty members can design consciousness-raising or advocacy-based projects that are not connected to a particular community partner.
  - Examples of what project-based work could look like:
    - Create marketing or social media content for future use
    - Conduct research on best practices or develop tools for program assessment
    - Support the development team by researching grant opportunities
    - Create brochures or other materials for information-sharing
    - Create birthday cards to give to a local housing shelter or senior center
    - Taping, recording, or streaming performances or workshops to benefit community partner(s)
    - Create a resource (build a website?) of activities for after-school programming
    - Organize data that the partner has already collected
• Conduct background research or gather best practices or other information requested by the partner(s)
• Consider other ideas about CEL activities that can be completed when in-person engagement is limited such as assignments about the role of advocacy in social impact, civic-minded online games, and community organizing activities.

Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship

• You may have students working on independent projects connected to a thesis or independent study, or as part of a course. As their academic lives intersect with other responsibilities at home, cultivate opportunities for students to think about their scholarly projects as an experience of personal fulfillment. Provide concrete opportunities for students to reflect on their scholarly motivations and create virtual spaces for students to share their progress.
• Create a “virtual capstone celebration” where students in capstone courses create videos and share their projects with the campus community through poster presentations. See this example from Loyola University New Orleans.
• Consider participating in a virtual mini-series through the Office of Undergraduate Research that spotlights faculty members’ research projects. More information soon!

Embedding Career Readiness

To prepare for graduate or professional school, as well as for the job market, students need to be developing resumes and cover letters that will require them to communicate the unique strengths of a liberal arts education from North Central College. They will also need to establish a professional presence virtually and learn strategies to engage and communicate with employers online.

• Include a course assignment that requires students to develop resumes and cover letters for an actual job posting in your field for future review by the Office of Career Development.
• Require that your students learn about and activate their Handshake account, the online platform used by Career Development.
• Have students reflect on their current social media and online presence. What would future employers see?
Engagement: Embedded Mini-HIP Units

- The AAC&U has identified a series of High-Impact Practices (HIPs) that, when executed well, promote substantial benefits for student learning, persistence, and retention. Regardless of course modality, embedding a “mini-HIP unit” within a course could facilitate the development of an entire course structured around career readiness in the discipline, a CEL project, or a course-based undergraduate research experience.

- Building HIPs into your courses fosters a deeper connection to North Central and cultivates a more holistic student experience, as students are invited to connect with a variety of offices on campus. Below is a list of some of the connections you might make as you brainstorm about a mini-HIP unit.

  o Undergraduate Research
    - Dr. Nick Boaz, Director of Undergraduate Research (ncboaz@noctrl.edu)
  o Community Engaged Learning
    - Dr. Kristin Geraty, Associate Dean for Engaged Learning (kgeraty@noctrl.edu)
    - Ms. Kamelotte Gregory, Assistant Director of the Center for Social Impact (kmgregory@noctrl.edu)
    - Ms. Margaret Stacy-Duffy, Assistant Director of the Center for Social Impact (mcstacyduffy@noctrl.edu)
  o Career Readiness
    - Ms. Haydee Nunez, Director of Career Development (hnunez@noctrl.edu)
    - Ms. Barbara Fouts, Assistant Director of Career Development (bafouts@noctrl.edu)

Sources Consulted:


Kuh, G. 2009. What Student Affairs Professionals Need to Know about Student Engagement. Journal of College Student Development.
