Showcase of AUC Faculty Teaching During Emergency Online Instruction - Spring 2020

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It has been a whirlwind, since AUC moved to emergency online instruction in March 2020 and we want to applaud faculty and students who have been working in this way.

CLT has been collecting samples of good teaching practices from AUC faculty during the period of emergency online instruction. Although there are many known good practices for online teaching, we felt it would be useful to collect stories of what faculty feel has worked well in their courses in these particular circumstances.

We conducted a webinar of faculty showcasing their practices, with Mona Amer (PSYC), Ahmed Tolba (MGMT), Matthew Hendershot (RHET), Lobna Mourad (SCI/BIOL) and Wafik Lotfallah (MACT). You can watch the webinar.

We also asked faculty to give us the single most important tip, practice, or story they would like to share with others. Here are twelve of the stories we received from a diverse set of disciplines, and we may send more samples in a future newsletter.

Engaging Students

Chris Barker (POLS) shared how he engages students in his seminar-style class:

My classes are taught in a feedback-oriented seminar style, so I needed a way of keeping that up while in online-only mode. I am using Mentimeter asynchronously for polling students. In advance, I set the Mentimeter slides to audience pace (vs. presenter pace) and email the code to the students. The default is, I think, that the code works for two days, but I've set it to seven days in one instance (a large class). The students respond on their phones as normal, and then I download the slides and either upload results slides to our discussion board for discussion or into my PowerPoint lectures.

[CLT note: Mentimeter has a free version faculty can explore, and a similar free tool that is less aesthetically pleasing is Google forms. While using Zoom, you may also use the polling feature for multiple choice type questions]

Alyssa Young (RHET)
From a logistical perspective, the shift online was not too difficult for me since I already create a Google Site for each of my classes through which I collect and organize all materials, assignments, handouts, PPTs, etc. However, what is most difficult to translate to an online delivery format is the element of interactivity.

Interactivity consists of both my interaction with students and interaction amongst students. My interaction with students was an easier challenge to address, but getting students to interact amongst themselves took some effort. One strategy that helped was holding synchronous Zoom sessions during class time and then splitting students into groups of 3 or 4 using Zoom's 'Breakout Rooms' feature to discuss or complete a task, and then report back to the whole class. However, since I have a number of students who struggle with slow internet connections and other technical difficulties, I also wanted to provide opportunities for participation and interaction asynchronously. To address this, I began posting discussion questions on a shared Google Doc and asking each student to respond to one of the questions and make two comments on their classmates' responses. I was surprised at how well this worked and it's something I think I will continue even when teaching face to face. Some students who weren't always confident speaking in class really shone when given time to compose their thoughts in writing, and others got engaged in conversations and debates with their classmates by 'commenting' and 'replying' on the Google Doc. I also found that the asynchronous format gave me the opportunity to reply in more depth than is sometimes allowed by the constraints of class time. And I even learned (from my students 😄) how to use emojis in Google Docs which added a nice affective element to our interactions ☺.

Naila Hamdy (JRMC)

You would think that teaching multimedia reporting during a pandemic would be impossible but fortunately, it worked out well.

On the Wednesday before we shutdown I invited an Egyptian multimedia reporter to show students how with no access and an extremely limited-budget she is able to report on stories for her website. One news story showed students was about Kurdish families fleeing Turkey was based on crowdsourcing using What's App. She reached a woman who sent audio notes, and short videos telling the story. Other aspects of the story were illustrated as drawings or written as text.

Using similar techniques, I reversed student work having them conduct all interviews via communication technologies, gathering all data into info grams and using pictures and filming that they can't do physically through sites like creative commons. Crowd sourcing techniques are key to their work. They also had some material gathered before the lockdown. Final presentations will take place on Zoom with an audience.

I use blackboard to post readings announcements, grades, videos, readings, instructions and short lectures Panopte for asynchronous learning. We meet on Zoom for live discussions and individual group instruction. Informal/quick communication is on What'sApp. Assessment methods have not changed.

Jillian Campana (ARTS/Theater)
All of my classes are performance based right now. Though I have found I can deliver the content remotely, it is the human connection and interaction students are missing. So, I'm trying a lot of exercises that get students connecting with each other in front of the class.
Most of these are variations of the work that I would do live. There are issues of course but I'm persevering and trying for as much remote face-to face as possible. I'm doing a lot of work with individual students or partners - watching them perform and then giving feedback through zoom or google meet. I've also reached out to several notable theatre practitioners and held master classes with them as guest artists. It's a great opportunity for our students to hear from professionals, who might have a bit more time to engage right now. I also make use of Digital Theatre Plus, which AUC has access to through the library databases: they offer professional theatre performances from around the world that were filmed live. Our Theatre students thrive on extra-curricular activities so I launched a playwriting project and now am working on a remote sketch comedy project open to all AUCians.

Hesham Eleraqi (CSCE)
It was much easier for me to switch the lectures-based classes to online classes than conducting Labs online. Specifically, it was challenging to deliver my Digital Design Lab online without breaking some of the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). I feel really proud of how we've managed to cope with such a challenge so far!

We enabled each student to connect remotely from home to a PC in the lab to use and access the lab licensed software and tools. The hardware materials needed for each lab experiment are physically connected to all the lab machines. We also connect a camera to each PC that monitors the connected hardware to allow students to see it remotely while programming it. Interestingly, we enabled students to mimic pressing the hardware push buttons or switches remotely through their home PC keyboard! In short, students can remotely program, see, and control/interact with the hardware and to use the lab software and tools.

This is a team effort, and I have to thank Dr. Mohamed Shalan and Eng. Amr ElShorbagy for their great contribution to it. This would not have been possible without the full support received from the university and my department (CSE) in terms of providing the cameras and buying the remote access tools. And for sure I would like to thank my amazing students who showed great levels of agility and cooperation.

Alex Lewko (ELI)
The most important thing I learned when teaching online was to be focused; I would keep in mind the learning outcomes I wanted to work on for the particular class session and do my best to have focused instruction and activities. The axiom "Less is More" proved to be the most important to live by. Students seemed to be more successful in any particular class session where the lesson plan was very focused; if the lesson plan was any "busier" than that, students felt too rushed (it seems like time flies online in comparison to face-to-face!). In the end, I found that student output during class, whether it be in writing, editing, or other hands-on activities, was often better online than what was done face-to-face. I cannot say why, but that was my perception.

The other interesting thing to learn was to balance synchronous and asynchronous learning. I had to do my best to make sure asynchronous learning did not feel like just a bunch of assignments. While I was not always successful at convincing some students of this, I realized that it was important with asynchronous sessions to be very clear as to how they fit into the bigger structure of the course and how these do support success towards the major assessments.

Finally, I was very fortunate to have a group of resilient students who always had a very good attitude towards this semester. Not everything worked as well as I would have liked, but they rolled with the punches and continued to take the course seriously and do the work

Wafik Lotfallah (MACT)

- Schedule all lectures on zoom during the class meeting time, and post links to their recordings on BB. Unlike Panopto, these lectures are interactive, and can be instantly shared with the students.
- Run the lectures on campus using the white board. You can also ask questions during the exam and let them write their answers in private as a sign of participation.
- Create whatsapp groups for quick interactions and discussions with the students. Occasionally share with them music and jokes.
- Have the students submit weekly assignments/quizzes on webassign or on BB.
- Exams are run on BB using Respondus followed by short oral exams (5 min). Students can opt out from using Respondus in exchange for a long oral exam (30 min)

Alternative Assessments

Mona Said (ECON) shared how she moved to alternative assessment:

After attending the webinar on alternative assessments, I designed a different kind of exam to test in-depth understanding of theory in labor economics, followed by an oral exam for a random sample to confirm that the answers were the result of their own work.

 It was a very hectic and time consuming process but very successful in terms of student satisfaction, and convincing me that they achieved learning outcomes while abiding by honor code signed. I learnt a lot about how to design a better assessment and establish a conducive environment for honest behavior and rigorous conceptual understanding of course content that goes beyond memorization or shallow knowledge of theories.

I would not have invested all this effort, had it it not been for this crisis forcing me to do so and I believe both myself and students came out of experience respecting each other and the learning process much more. So here is a bit of the silver lining of on-line learning for you :)

Ahmed Tolba (MGMT):
My strategy to conduct exams this semester is as follows:
1. Open-book, open-notes exams, timed (usually 1:15 to 1:30 hours)
2. Short problems/case studies with specific questions (as mentioned above)
3. I create at least 6 versions of the exam, with different numbers and different companies/industries, so the final answers are not the same; though the key conclusions and the levels of difficulty are the same. I distributed the versions in a way that teams working on group projects together do not take the same version.
4. I do not proctor students, so I do not plan to use Respondus.
5. The exam is usually designed to take exactly the time assigned (for an average student), so no one will have the time to consult with others; or else he/she may not be able to finish the exam.

Nour Zaki (PSYC)
I did an alternative assessment instead of the midterm that turned out to be good.

I teach abnormal psychology and we used to do interactive case vignettes in class - the students enjoyed them. Somebody pretends to be the therapist and asks the "client" some questions that are already provided. Then we listen to the client's

answers and description of his/her situation. As if the student is the therapist, he/she answers questions about the case vignette (e.g. diagnosis, symptoms, treatment options, etc).

So, I audio recorded the client's answers and compiled them in one file - which I sent to the students one day prior to the assessment. They were supposed to listen carefully to two case vignettes (to assess two different chapters) and take their own notes. Then, the next day, they had access to a timed questionnaire about these case vignettes. The questions were related to what the client described and their own interpretation of it. They were allowed to check their books, go back to their notes, or even listen to some parts of the audios again. It's not a matter of checking the material or memorizing information but rather having a good understanding of the content and being able to apply it to a "real" case.

I guess we're all trying to be creative with our assignments as much as possible by adapting them to the learning outcomes.

Adham Ramadan (CHEM)

1. Imbed within the course slides "self-tests" with questions testing the understanding of concepts. Students are encouraged to respond to these in writing and send them to me for individual feedback, highlighting issues that a student might have not understood fully.
2. Increase the weight on the paper component of the course, allowing students to improve on their papers based on feedback I provide on their drafts, so basically allowing one-on-one mentoring for producing a finalized paper.
3. Replace exams with online timed-tests, open book and open notes. The Test questions (MCQs or short answers) aim at testing concepts and skills, and not information. Test times are such so as to have students only have enough time to answer questions with brief checking of the textbook or notes, but little else.

Zeinab Amin (MACT)

I always believed the key to good teaching is both enthusiasm and command of the subject, and the key to a good teacher-student relationship is seeing students as individuals. Overnight we shifted to remote teaching, we were advised not to hold synchronous sessions, and to record our lectures using Panopto. Seeing students as individuals was no longer an easy task. Effective communication from day one was the key. My students know I will make every effort to foster their success and meet their expectations in this online environment, I have high expectations of them and that their motivation and commitment to learning is what will enable us to meet the learning objectives of the course. I tried to diversify the types of tasks assigned to students and divert from the traditional types of assessment, mainly problem solving, students in the School of Sciences and Engineering are used to. After every class I created an activity for students to check their understanding. Providing individual feedback on every submission was time-consuming, but worth the effort. I introduced a writing assessment test in which I asked students not to use technical language, to keep the public audience in mind, and to use examples from their everyday life to make their ideas clearer. I gave 1:1 oral tests which were very time consuming but extremely beneficial. I got to know the work ethic of my students, their commitment, their thought processes, and the study habits and practices that work best for them. Overall this was a very positive learning experience. It created a good climate for learning, it allowed me to reflect and think of more effective forms of assessment and it built resiliency in my students. I think this is a beginning of many changes that will happen in the way we teach and in the way students learn!