

Editor's Perspective Article: Remote Learning: Successfully Adapting to Our New Modality

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Abstract

The focus in this issue's third Editor's Perspective article is on helping students adapt to the new modality of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article was written to help teachers and professors who are teaching remotely to assist their students in creating a successful learning experience.

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The views expressed in this article are the editor's views and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Association for Alternative Certification.

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As all of us are coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities and school systems have switched to remote learning in response. In this article, I wanted to share some of the communications and techniques I have been using with my own students. Different teachers and professors are using different platforms. I am currently using Zoom and Blackboard for my students. We have been holding our classes synchronously using Zoom video and supplementing with Blackboard's Discussion Board as needed.

Communication is the key to success for our students. I created and shared the following two pieces of advice (Remote Learning and Virtual Café) with my own students at my university in order to help them communicate with others and with me as their professor.

Remote Learning

Given the changes we are experiencing with remote learning, it's natural that many students will be anxious about being successful in this new learning environment. Different teachers and professors may be conducting classes in different manners.

Remote learning can occur synchronously (meeting during regular class time; e.g., through direct video conference such as Blackboard Collaborate or Zoom) or asynchronously (not meeting during regular class time; e.g. Blackboard Discussion Board conversation, watching uploaded videos on student's own time, reading materials uploaded to Blackboard, and submitting work assignments online).

Students may experience challenges in a remote learning environment such as equipment issues (e.g., laptop/desktop vs. phone and Wi-Fi connection speeds) and independent learning issues (e.g., discipline and time management needed when working on one's own time).

There are ways to improve your learning and reduce your anxiety about the changes we are experiencing.

1. Communicate with your professor and let the professor know about your situation (e.g., equipment issues, etc.).
2. Communicate with your professor about any concerns you have about being successful in this new learning modality. Your professors are here to help you. They are also adapting to a new environment, and they may also be anxious about successfully teaching their courses through an unfamiliar way of doing so. Keeping communication open is important for being successful.
3. Go to virtual office hours. Many professors are meeting with students through video or phone calls during office hours or by appointment. Take advantage of this time.
4. Communicate with classmates. Even in the new modality, you are not learning alone. Research shows that students learn best when they learn together collaboratively. Students can reach out to each other for support and set up their own study sessions through video, phone calls, or text/email.
5. Communicate with your academic advisor. Your advisor is also here to help you, and will offer you good advice on being successful.

6. Many offices at the University are adapting to the new environment including the Learning and Writing Centers. Watch for information coming from these offices.
7. Check your email frequently. Email has been an important way for the University and your professors to communicate with you. Now, more than ever, it's important that you receive updates from the administration and your professors.

Remember, communication is the key to success. Communicate with your professors, classmates, advisors, and other offices at the University. Together, we will be successful!

Virtual Café: Student Study Groups, Collaborative Learning, and Socialization

Research shows that students learn best when they work in collaborative groups with other students. Groups should be heterogeneous, which means students of all academic achievement levels should work together. Studies show that even higher achieving students benefit from collaborative learning through their own improved understanding of the academic material from helping other classmates and summarizing the material into their own words.

Moreover, research shows that socialization is an important part of the learning process. Students should interact with other students frequently, and those who do tend to stay in school and perform better academically. The classic college experience is one in which students work with other students both inside and outside of the classroom.

During these challenging times, it is important to stay connected with your classmates. Students are encouraged to form their own “Virtual Café” study groups to work together and ask each other questions.

Students are encouraged to set up their own meetings (e.g., using Zoom at my university) with groups of about 3-5 students, and for everyone in the group to make themselves a homemade tea or coffee. This creates the “Virtual Café” experience in the spirit of academic discourse café culture from the Parisian tradition.

Students can discuss different topics from their class, and should take time to socialize as well. Remember that it is important to connect socially with one another, especially during these challenging times in which people can feel isolated and alone. Students are encouraged to invite their professors, when they are available, if there are questions the group cannot answer on their own.

Enjoy the tea and coffee, and the Virtual Café experience!

Conclusion

I hope Remote Learning and Virtual Café will be found useful to the *JNAAC* readership. We are in very challenging times, and it is very easy to feel disconnected, lonely, and isolated from one another. Our students will need to communicate with us, as well as each other, during these times. Fortunately, many of the virtual platforms allow for some sense of connection with one another as we adapt to this new modality. My hope is that this will be less disruptive and will not go

on for too long. However, we ought to be prepared to function in our new environment for some time. We can get through this through supporting one another. Thank you for all you do!