



Remote Teaching Updates & Resources

1 message

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To:

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How Do I Care for My Students and Myself During This Difficult Time?

By Bethany N. Morrison on Apr 19, 2020 08:59 pm



Today's post is an entry in our "Ask the CAT" column. Readers can [submit questions](#) related to remote teaching and a member of the CAT will answer them publicly.

Dear Tabby,

This week I have noticed more students wanting to chat about life in general, including their fears, living conditions, and the things we are all experiencing. At least two of my faculty colleagues have also been getting more requests for one-on-one Zoom sessions and texts from students who are struggling. I know we all want to be present and available, particularly in the current crisis, but I'm also concerned about faculty well-being. In the emergency remote teaching environment, what strategies do you suggest for maintaining the balance

between availability and healthy boundaries?

-Supportive AND Stretched-Thin

Hi Supportive,

Your question is a tough one, even under normal teaching conditions. It's tangled up with issues of equity: women faculty and faculty of color tend to give more of their time to this demand; promotion decisions don't have a good way of counting this labor; personal relationships with faculty mentors are a powerful tool for helping traditionally underrepresented groups of students succeed in higher education; students from backgrounds of privilege might be more comfortable asking for individualized support.

Emergency remote teaching has highlighted, maybe even enhanced, these existing tensions in the trade-off between supportiveness and boundaries. And it has brought new challenges too, both emotional and logistical. Let's start there.

#CovidCampus: Intensifying Our Need to Connect

Our students are lonely, unsure, scared, restless, overwhelmed, and facing a global crisis unlike any they've seen before. **Of course** they want to talk with the important people in their lives. How do we balance this reality with our new realities? We're supposed to be homeschooling, nannying, radically redesigning our courses in the middle of the semester, stocking our homesteads, producing scholarship, contributing to committees, not to mention that we too are lonely, unsure, scared, restless, overwhelmed, and facing a global crisis unlike any we've seen before!

My best strategy here is to pause and assess. When a student asks for a one-on-one meeting or communication, is it possible that they actually need something other than your counsel and support?

Asking to Talk & Process

Maybe your student needs to talk to someone other than their family members, roommate or houseplant about what's going on in their lives. That's legit! But that person doesn't have to be you. They have each other. You can help your student meet this need by facilitating more spaces for them to talk with each other about the strange times we live in! Here are three strategies to do just that:

First, you could meet with a small group of students during your office hours. It's more efficient and, if they just need a space to talk, they'll have you and each other.

Second, you can create a discussion board on Canvas and Sakai dedicated to conversations outside of coursework. You can model how to use this board by sharing a photo of how strange Costco is now. Or you trying to grade their papers while your two-year-old tries to climb on top of you.

Finally, you can set aside time at the beginning of a Zoom meeting for students to chat with a small group of classmates in break-out rooms. Give them a question to discuss, but make it non-academic. What extracurriculars are you missing most? How are you managing shelter-in-place? Similarly, you can transfer the Zoom host position to a student at the end of the meeting, so they can continue to chat after you leave the meeting.

Asking for the WFU Student Support Team

Alternatively, maybe they don't need to chat with peers. Maybe they are in-crisis. Pause and assess: do they need you, their teacher, or do they need a professional? Don't feel bad if your response to a student struggling is to refer them to a student support office. Your WFU colleagues in these offices have the time, the expertise, and the experience to support your student in ways that you can't. Don't know where to direct them? For mental health concerns, start with the [University Counseling Center](#) at 336-758-5273. The [Office of the Chaplain](#) at 336-758-5210 is another option. For concerns about their academic progress, try [the Office of Academic Advising](#) at 336-758-3320.

If you are concerned that directing them won't be enough, then agree to a meeting during your prescribed office hours. Use that meeting to help the student make these connections or come up with their own plan for getting the support they need. Do the virtual equivalent of walking them to the counseling center.

Asking for Their Teacher

Finally, let's say you pause and assess, then come to the determination that they need to talk to you, their teacher and/or mentor. If that's the case, then let's move onto strategies for supporting them while maintaining boundaries. I am going to assume you already have strategies in place for maintaining these boundaries in the pre-pandemic classroom. At the very least, you know what you ought to be doing to preserve the boundaries. How has the move to emergency remote teaching made these existing strategies more difficult to implement?

#CovidCampus: Disrupting Our Logistical Processes

On campus, you have this nifty piece of technology called your office door. It closes, which communicates two common messages: either you are meeting with someone discussing a personal matter or you are not presently available to meet with students. Have you figured out the tools to help you communicate these messages in your new situation?

Let's say your student wants to talk about something personal, without their classmates popping in. Have you tried the [Waiting Room feature](#) in a Zoom meeting? It's just like the waiting room at the dentist. A student clicks the link to join your Zoom office hours and, instead of immediately joining, they are directed to a virtual waiting room. As the meeting host, you will be notified that a new person is in the waiting room. When you have completed the conversation of a personal nature, you can bring the new student into the

meeting room from the waiting room.

Another option is to change your office hours model from “drop-in” hours to “sign-up” hours. You would break-up your office hours into shorter one-on-one meeting slots that students can sign-up for. You don’t need a special tool to make the change from “drop-in” to “sign-up.” An app can streamline appointment-based models by integrating with your video-conferencing and calendar apps. For example, we’ve been really happy with [Calendly](#) at the CAT.

The last thing you need right now is to get twenty emails a week requesting one-on-one appointments, which then leads to a back and forth about a time that works, which you then put on the calendar and in Zoom, making sure that each student gets the invite for the right time. That’s a logistical mess and time blackhole. Calendly is a solution for this problem.

You can give Calendly a set of rules about your availability, and it’ll take over the scheduling from there. For example, let’s say I want to be available on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for office hours. While I am technically available from 12 PM – 5 PM on these days, I can only afford to spend 2 hours in office hours on these days. I can give Calendly these parameters—fifteen minute appointments, between 12 – 5 on MWF, with no more than 2 hours a day—and it will offer appointment options within the parameters to students. Oh! Did I mention that I can tell Calendly that I need a five minute break between appointments? And that I don’t want anything popping up on my schedule at the last minute? It’s a life-saver.

Readers, this note only gets at **why** you might find these tools valuable to manage new logistical challenges in the Emergency Remote Teaching context. Please reach out to us if you’d like to learn more on **how to implement** them. Make a [remote consult with me](#) or [anyone on the team!](#)

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