



Remote Teaching Updates & Resources

1 message

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To

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First Contact: Getting (Back) in Touch with Your Students

By Betsy Barre on Mar 18, 2020 10:11 pm



Today's post is a guest post by [Kyle Denlinger](#), Digital Pedagogy and Open Education Librarian at ZSR.

So. Your students are scattered to the winds, their textbooks might still be in their dorm rooms, and you have no idea if they'll have access to reliable WiFi for the 249 Zoom sessions you plan to schedule. What's a newly-remote teacher to do?

Ask your students about their situation. Seriously. Just ask them. Send them an email and ask for private responses, or create a brief survey in Google Forms. The CAT has compiled a few terrific examples of surveys Wake faculty have already sent to their students to answer some of the following questions. See links to their examples below. Thanks to all of them for sharing!

Things to ask about

Where they'll be located. If you have students who are going to be spending the rest of the semester on the west coast, remember that your regularly-scheduled 8am Zoom call will require them to be awake and ready to participate by 5am Pacific. Maybe consider asynchronous methods, like recorded lectures and Canvas discussions, or at least recording your live sessions and making them available for later viewing if your west coast students miss a few.

Whether they have their textbook and other course materials. When our students left for spring break, many of them (shockingly!) decided not to bring their textbooks to the beach with them. If they weren't able to come back to retrieve them, they'll need access somehow. There are [a number of things you can do to ensure access](#), but you might just decide to drop that last novel, given the circumstances.

Whether they have access to quiet space. As many newly-remote teachers have [likely experienced firsthand by now](#), it can often be difficult to find a quiet, private place to work when you're surrounded by small children or loud pets. If your students will have similar trouble, then synchronous video discussions and even asynchronous audio or video work can be difficult. If they can't access quiet space, students might even have difficulty focusing to study for particularly intense exams.

Whether they have the necessary tech, ESPECIALLY reliable WiFi. It can be difficult, but resist making blanket assumptions about our students' access to the internet and digital technology. [The Digital Divide is still very much a real thing](#), and while our students enjoy reliable WiFi on campus, the same can't always be said for their home environment. If they have connectivity problems, your students will need downloadable materials, asynchronous tasks that can be accomplished with relative ease from a mobile device, and flexibility with schedules and due dates. And even if your students *don't* have connectivity problems, these things would still be appreciated.

Other things to acknowledge

Students' home lives can vary wildly. For some of our students, going home is not a pleasant experience. Some students might not be welcome at home or are subject to abuse there; some might be [experiencing food insecurity](#) or are living out of their car. Some will be caring for sick relatives. Some will get sick themselves. Of course I wouldn't ask about these things in a survey, but I am going to acknowledge these things in my revised syllabus and specifically call these things out when we start up next week. If students know that I know the game has changed, they might feel comfortable reaching out to me if they need help, and I can make accommodations or help connect them to the appropriate resources. It very well could be a student's only ally this semester is at this very moment sitting in a home office 300 miles away, reading this blog post (that means you, friend).

Everyone is anxious. These weird times have everyone on edge. We should be doing all we can to minimize the amount of anxiety we add to our students' plates. Clear, consistent, positive communication from you in the coming days will help to mitigate at least some of their anxiety. Try to be concise and *definitely* don't stuff their inboxes. Tell them how excited you are to reconnect with them. Remind them that we'll work through all of this together. Demonstrate your care for them. Let them know specifically when you'll be in touch again with more details, and follow through.

Student services are changing. As advocates for our students, we need to be aware of the many changes to student services and help to communicate these changes. You might consider copying and pasting the following into an email or Canvas announcement: "Like everyone else on campus, the [University Counseling Center](#), the [Learning Assistance Center & Disability Services](#), the [Writing Center](#), and the [ZSR Library](#) (among others) all have had to modify their service models. I want you to be aware of these changes in case you intend to make use of these valuable services."

Students will need new skills for studying (and self-advocacy). Learning in a traditional classroom context is something with which we're all familiar, but

when the internet is their classroom, students might quickly find themselves in need of some new study skills. Folks at Wake are currently working to produce a student-facing guide to learning online, but until then, check out these great guides from the [University of Michigan](#) and [UNC Greensboro](#). Share these guides with your students. Consider discussing online study skills during the first week of class, and maybe even ask your students to generate a personal action plan. They'll appreciate the time you've afforded them to think carefully about something that might otherwise stress them out. If your students report being subjected to problematic teaching practices, share with them [this guide from Sean Michael Morris](#), and do what you can to advocate on their behalf.

As we all approach this thoroughly weird teaching challenge, remember that what you say (and what you *don't* say) really matters. We all care a great deal about our students; let's let all of our communication with them this semester demonstrate that care.

Examples of Student Surveys

Thanks to the following faculty members for sharing examples of their pre-course surveys.

[Tom Brister \(Politics & International Affairs\)](#)

[Carmen Pérez-Muñoz \(Spanish & Italian\)](#)

[Kendall Tarte \(French Studies\)](#)

[Roz Tedford & Hu Womack \(ZSR Library\)](#)

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