Online Insights and Best Practices, from Doug Quackenbos, Marketing Department

Hi Colleagues,

In the spirit that it may be of help, *(and at Satish's suggestion*) I'd like to share some of my insights and learnings from online course delivery and outcome as we prepare for the remote teaching period and potentially beyond.

Clearly, while a planned online course is not the same as moving one from an in-seat to online delivery, there are perhaps some points of value within. Also, please note that this is written with the possible/probable expectation that all classes could be moved to a mandatory online format for the remainder of the semester *(as has occurred at many colleges and universities throughout the US)*. Also, online teaching itself I've learned, much like religion and politics, often illicit strong and varied opinions that quickly enter the realm of personal teaching philosophy – I'll leave that discussion for another day ……
Finally, I recognize that course content and class size will greatly influence delivery choices, etc. So, this is by no means intended to be a one-size-fits all recommendation, but simply some food for thought as we continue to prepare. Ideally, it may serve as a discussion thread for our department. In this spirit, please feel free to respond with comments, questions, clarifications, etc. and share what you may be planning, as I trust that many others, like myself, would appreciate learning of your experiences and ideas.

Here are some practices that I've found to help as well as what I plan to do:
- *Delivery format*:
  - **Asynchronous vs. synchronous:** determine whether you will deliver the content in an asynchronous or synchronous format. There are pros and cons to both approaches, but this choice is fundamental for communication. As all of my classes this semester have over at least 40 students, I'm planning to deliver asynchronously for the remote period.

- *Communication, communication, communication:*
  - **Regular announcements:** that inform the students of upcoming assignments (even if only to remind them of what is on the syllabus) can be very valuable to create an environment of control, stability and belonging, something that many students seem to feel when separated from classmates – and that I anticipate may be worse with the current heightened anxiety. Such announcements can also be valuable if/when needed to call a student to attention or justify a grade. I've found that about two-three per week is the ideal number.
  - **Email:** (if willing) Remind students that they can best contact you at your email and repeat this message in every communication. In my experience, most students will not contact you, but appreciate knowing that they can if needed. If they do write, *and you can and are willing* – respond immediately or asap. This practice is counter to conventional wisdom which recommends setting clear response guidelines (usually 24 hours, etc.) I find a quick reply often surprises the student and in turn sharpens the senses – especially in those cases where the response is something simple, such as a reference to a previous

announcement, etc. If it truly is something of significance, the student will appreciate the fast turn-around time.

- o **Office Hours:** remind students of your regularly scheduled office hours, but *again, if you can and are willing,* let them know that you're also able to talk at other times if needed. When needed, I like to schedule 30-minute blocks, and if possible, ask for clarity regarding the specific issue to be reviewed/discussed ahead of time so as to communicate a professional behavior and send a clear message that these meetings should be for issues that cannot be resolved more efficiently via email. In my experience, often, when students realize they've signed up for a lengthy and detailed conversation, they "discover" the information they needed/wanted on their own or from classmates.
- o **Rubrics**: (assignments and grading): Post these (as well as any revised ones) to course content and use announcements to tell the students that they are posted to course content. Again, this reduces the opportunity for confusion or misunderstood expectations *(or the temptation to take advantage of such a perception.)*

- Content and assignments:
  - o **Clustering** of assignment due dates: While it may seem counterintuitive, typical online etiquette is that assignments are due twice a week (i.e. Sundays and Thursdays, etc.) When an asynchronous format is used, this practice allows students to work at their own pace, while holding them responsible for timely completion. It also allows students to more easily recall deadlines and again, limit confusion and misunderstandings, especially as they will have multiple classes online at this period. *(note: it can increase instructor workload, so look out for crunch times)*
  - o **Recorded Lectures:** Short recordings can help maintain a sense of organization and clarity of themes, etc. Break longer lectures into shorter formats (i.e. 2-3 per regular in-seat class).

- Participation: (and belonging)
  - o **Discussion Boards:** can create a great forum for earning (or replacing) participation credit and increasing engagement. A typical format that works well is to ask each student to make an initial, original post (referencing an assignment, recorded lecture, video, etc.) by Thursday at 9pm and then respond to at least two of their classmates by 9pm Sunday. Initially, many students may simply go "through the motions", stating the obvious and/or simplest statements to complete the requirement. However, peer pressure usually drives them to improve the quality of content and length of response. An instructor summary at the end of the discussion time is valuable to signal the end of the assignment and provide group feedback. (note: based on shared colleague experience, I'm no longer alarmed to find that seldom do students respond to my posts.) Equally importantly, I've found that a highly valuable by-product of discussion boards is that they can also increase a sense of belonging and community among students, especially those who may feel more isolated or anxious.

- Testing: (and quizzes)

- o **Exams:** I do not have any exams scheduled during our remote period, but for fully online course have successfully used tests created in BB and proctored via ProctorU (*not yet clear if UofSC will pay the cost or if the student would be expected to do so*). Offering a test in this format may require some flexibility regarding the test window times. I'm happy to discuss this or any of the above points with you individually.

I hope you find this helpful, and look forward to our continued sharing of best practices and innovative ideas. Thanks.