March 28, 2020

Stearns Center: Teaching Ideas for the Weeks Ahead

Dear Colleagues,

As this week comes to a close, it seems like the right time to pause and assess all that you have accomplished this week. Thanks to your heroic efforts, we’re now able to deliver all of our courses to our students remotely! While there is more work to be done in the latter half of the semester, let’s take a moment for all of you to give yourselves a virtual pat on the back for making it through this first week of remote learning.

Congratulations! You did it!

Having gotten through this first week and this initial transition, we are turning our attention to the next phase, where we can support your efforts to consider how to sustain student learning, and your own teaching, through the end of the semester. This is a good time to take stock of key priorities for what students should learn and consider how to help students focus on and engage with those goals. We’d like to offer a few ideas and questions to reflect on in the days ahead.

1. **Continue to make your expectations clear.** At this point, you’ve begun your courses and (ideally) communicated any changes in procedures and deadlines. The key message here is to be sure that you’ve set clear expectations for your students, which you should reiterate often.

2. **Provide opportunities for practice and feedback.** You should consider how students will practice the skills in the course and know if they are meeting the primary objectives. How can you provide students with milestones and other opportunities for practice and feedback, particularly in advance of major assignments? The more you can help students identify clear sequences and steps—how this lecture leads to a quiz which leads to a review session and then an exam, for instance—the easier it will be for them to focus their learning and achieve the goals you set.

3. **Prioritize your key goals.** As you plan for the coming week, reflect on how you normally use your class time and how you ask students to use their study time. What do you most want students to achieve by the end of the week? What steps should they take on their own (such as reading, viewing, taking notes, or trying problem sets), and what steps are best guided by you (such as analyzing issues, working through case studies or tricky theories, or connecting to real-world situations)?

In a typical week, most courses involve some combination of presentation of content (through print, video, or spoken information), checking for student understanding (through question-and-answer, quizzes, quick surveys, or short discussion postings), and collaborative work that advances more complex thinking (such as in-class discussion, problem-solving, or short written assignments). Reflecting on your course in this manner...
will help you to identify your goals, and the areas that you’ll want to spend the most time developing online.

4. **Be the bridge.** Find ways to reach out to your students **regularly.** Remember that many students are now receiving significantly more announcements and emails from faculty than they may be used to, so try to establish a predictable rhythm for connecting with them during the week, and be patient if they miss a step. If you have time, you may want to reach out individually to students you have not heard from or seen in any of your live course meetings. We appreciate the efforts that you are making to be a bridge: to help identify students who are struggling and connect them to resources that the university is making available, and to let your chairs and directors know about additional resources that may be needed.

The [University Life home page](#) is the hub for all student resources and communications to students. Resources for student success and emergency assistance funding requests are located here. Of special note is the [Keep Learning page](#), which has a lot of advice for how to be a successful online learner.

5. **Pay attention to your well-being.** You will hear this from us often over these next few weeks. We know that with the Governor’s announcement earlier this week, many of you are figuring out how to best care for your families and loved ones, while also managing your work. We have created a page, Supporting Faculty During COVID-19, that provides a variety of resources to assist you.

Know that we are here for you. Please feel free to discuss these ideas, or other needs you have with regard to your classes and students, with members of our instructional support teams. As a reminder, here are links to our key resources:

- Stearns Center’s Keep Teaching, Instructional Continuity site ([especially the resources listed in our Stage Two and Stage Three sections](#))
- Blackboard and other instructional support resources for faculty
- Exam Conversion intake form
- Request a consultation with an Instructional Designer

With gratitude for all that you are doing and please take care,

The Stearns Center and Blackboard Support Teams