



In Line with Online? A Crash Course in Powering Up Online Coursework at your Institution

Implementing online classes quickly with the coronavirus pandemic may have you feeling like you're on inline skates, when you're accustomed to rollerskating.

But, you can adapt with some straightforward tips and a positive outlook. You'll be speed skating in no time with your students.

Keep in mind that the majority of students in post-secondary classes today are either Millennials (24-39 yrs old, born between 1981-1996) or Generation Z (under 24 yrs old, born 1996-2015).

Millennials are our digital pioneers, so they have been adapting to technology throughout their lives.

Gen Z's are our digital natives. They haven't known anything else in their lifetimes other than the electronic experience.

Both generations are probably wondering why their classes aren't already offered online. (Similar to my generation wondering where our flying cars are)

If anyone says, "Don't Worry", then you should worry. It's not a one-size-fits-"All Skate". It does typically take a much more strategic approach to effectively implement an online modality.

There are many intricacies to any academic offering. But we've gotta do what we've gotta do.

The good news is that you're more than halfway there if you have strong academic on-campus courses. Some at your college or university will find online exciting. Others will feel it impossible.

Either way, the future is now.

This crisis will allow us to truly leverage the power of technology across all post-secondary education. And it will help us better prepare graduates for a digital, global economy.

Whether you see yourself as the graceful figure skater or the tough hockey player, both apply. You need finesse and rigor.

Here are some basic, yet critical, steps to adapting to the online modality that all your stakeholders can embrace.

Leadership and Academic Administrators: Be Upfront and Out Front

1. **Share your vision** on what success looks like for your institution when online classes are delivered well. Empower faculty and staff to make it happen for your students. It will happen with a clear vision.
2. **Select the best modality option** for your institution, whether it's asynchronous or synchronous learning, or both. If you've already offered online classes in some coursework, you can convert other courses relatively “painlessly”. If you've never offered online classes, you may want to start with a synchronous format, such as videoconferencing with Zoom or Adobe Connect. In today’s Chronicle article, “Preparing for Emergency Online Teaching”, it was noted that “Learning-management systems like Blackboard and Canvas are ubiquitous across the education landscape. And while some instructors may use only a bare minimum of tools in their LMS, that’s a start.” For an alternative implementation, there are many outstanding Online Program Management providers that can be consulted. “We stand ready to assist schools who are in need today, as well as those who are interested in planning online delivery more strategically in the future,” said Shane Clem, Vice President of Academic Partnerships at Pearson Education.

3. **Empower academic leaders** to set clear institutional standards as overarching institutional expectations. For example, attendance requirements are critical from one course to another. In a large university with several colleges, it is not prudent to allow an online course in one college to have different attendance standards than an online course in another college. Just like on-campus courses, there are compliance reasons, such as whether or not your students have access to Title IV funding. And, it will also save you headaches amongst your student body if you have standardized guidelines for your faculty to follow. Academic freedom does not mean allowing faculty carte blanche.
4. **Ensure quality assurance** with someone assigned to monitoring the online classroom right away. Long term, you can plan for roles such as instructional specialists to monitor online classrooms. You must verify that high quality teaching and learning is taking place.
5. **Provide tools and resources upfront** for your faculty, students, and staff if you can. Faculty are typically not from the digital pioneering or digital native generations. Be aware that many students may not have access to a computer or laptop at home. And their phone data plan may max out quickly in an online course. These students need help or they will surely fall and fall again. Falling is bruising to the ego and results in dropping or failing.



6. **Over-communicate.** In times of uncertainty or ambiguity, we can't communicate enough with each other. If your teams don't have an opportunity for overt communication, it will become covert. Harsh penalty for any initiative.
7. **Thank your hard-working teams** for adapting so quickly and recognize notable efforts.

Faculty: Embrace Innovation

1. **Your students will adapt** more easily than you think. Adjust quickly yourself. Students need your leadership and guidance with a positive mindset more than ever. Educators claim to be radical thinkers, but usually aren't in the front of radical changes. This is an opportunity to lead from the edge.
2. **You're focusing on the wrong end of the student** if you think the student has to be sitting in your classroom to learn. This astute statement came from an online education pioneer, former University of Phoenix President, Dr. Laura Palmer-Noone.

3. **Organize your content** to reflect the same syllabus as your on-campus class. The outcomes and expectations should be the same. Your ongoing assessment process can be adaptable to the online classroom.
4. **Avoid teaching class in a lecture format.** There's nothing worse than binge-watching or reading lecture after lecture whether in person or online. Get online discussions going and use different learning aids to engage students.
5. **Follow your institution's online guidelines** and pivot if they change. Although you have academic freedom in your course, keep in mind that there are (or will be) structured institutional online guidelines to follow.
6. **Hold faculty office hours**, provide access to open labs or resource centers. It's ok to offer these in-person with the appropriate social distance, unless or until guided otherwise.
7. **Don't be afraid to ask for help** from your academic leaders or other faculty who are more accustomed to facilitating online courses. You could even check in with faculty from other institutions already offering online successfully. Document findings and share best practices.

In. This. Together.



Staff/Counselors: High Tech needs High Touch

1. **Create an early alert system** by reaching out to your students often. It will be critical for you to communicate to the faculty member when you discover that a student is struggling.
2. **Find ways to connect and engage.** Relationships can flourish online. Students will find your support a big part of their academic success in a new environment.
3. **Feature success stories.** Be sure to share when students have embraced and made progress in their program goals because of the online format. Share with other students through social media and other means of internal communication. Some people can't be what they can't see.



Students: “Eat the Frog First”

1. **Tackle what scares you first** and the rest will be easier to swallow. You’ll be an online pro before you know it!
2. **An online learning experience can be enriching**, and maybe even more than on-campus classes. Take charge of your learning. Remain open-minded and actively participate.
3. **The integrity of your degree will not change** because your institutional leaders and faculty are working hard to ensure a meaningful online academic experience for you.
4. **This is your orientation to e-learning.** Whether your institution offers online classes short-term or long-term, you will encounter more online learning in the workplace or in your next advanced degree. You can thrive, not just survive!

I know, I know. A triple salchow doesn’t happen overnight.



You may face issues without knowing the right decision for its stakeholders. Use the institution's core values, along with data, to determine what is right each step of the way.

Tensions may run high at your school, but remember that you're all on the same team. Have empathy for each other.

Just get out there on the ice. You'll feel like you're on thin ice now and then. And yes, you'll fall. But, you will get your balance.

You are not only implementing your future business continuity plans for hurricanes, blizzards, or unforeseen occurrences in your area. You are devising an inventive teaching and learning model at your institution that will be leveraged and improved in the coming years.

As stated in Pearson Education's Learners Survey 2019, "People expect digital and virtual learning to be the new normal in the next decade. People are using technology in every aspect of their lives and they are now embracing it as part of their education. From online degrees, artificial intelligence (AI) tools and smart devices, people see the future of learning made easier and more engaging with technology."



My advice is that you not treat the online modality as a temporary one. Open your mind and open your doors to virtual learning on a permanent basis. A new normal.

You don't need to abandon brick and mortar classes, but recognizing "click and mortar" is not only necessary today, but relevant to future needs and wants.

Skate where the puck is going to be.

You can provide personalized learning-centered, small classes in an online environment that produce excited students who become empowered graduates in a digital economy.

And you just might adapt to the point where you will not only tolerate online teaching and learning, but invite it.

Keep your stick on the ice. Be focused. Be ready.

You can you skate with balance. You'll make every movement appear graceful and effortless.

And performance can shine.

Let me know the shots I've missed here. I know there are many more basic tips from online education pioneers smarter than me.

#onlinelearning #highereducation #digitaleconomy