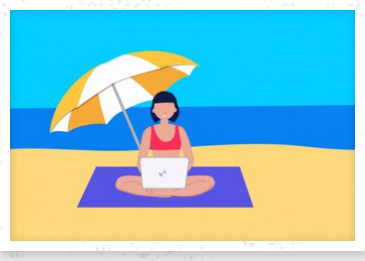
The Coaching Chronicles

ISSUE 1 VOLUME 16

HOW TO SPEND YOUR PANDEMIC SUMMER VACATION



A professor creates a syllabus to guide herself and other faculty members in preparing for more remote teaching this fall, amid Covid-19

By Sarah Rose Cavanagh JUNE 09, 2020

https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-I-m-Spending-My-Pandemic/248954

The coming academic year is marked by profound uncertainty. Lately it feels less like a house of cards has fallen and more like someone flipped the whole damn table. Even optimistic scenarios for the fall semester suggest at least occasional shifts between face-to-face and remote learning.

Coronavirus Hits Campus

As colleges and universities have struggled to devise policies to respond to the quickly evolving situation, here are links to *The Chronicle*'s key coverage of how this worldwide health crisis is affecting campuses.

- Here's a List of Colleges' Plans for Reopening in the Fall
- In Some States This Fall, Masks at Public Colleges Will Be 'Encouraged' but Not Required
- Months After Congress Sent Emergency Aid to College Students, Distribution Remains Spotty

As a faculty member who writes about pedagogy and co-directs a teaching center, I have sat on countless panels and committees where we extol the virtues of a liberal-arts education. Our goal, we always say, is to graduate educated citizens who can think with agility and adapt

to a world full of dizzying social and technological change. Now that a pandemic has upended the teaching profession, *we* are the ones who need to be lifelong learners.

What that means for me: I need to become a better online teacher. Fortunately, I have a fair bit of practice in teaching people new things. So I've created a summer syllabus for myself. I share it here in hopes that it may help other faculty members sharpen their online-teaching skills and prepare for September.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

A war of sorts is raging in the academic think-piece-o-sphere. Dueling factions argue about the value of online education, about whether to use the disrupted spring term as a test case of remote learning, and about how to proceed in the fall term. Regardless of how the op-ed battles pan out, I need to be prepared. At the end of my self-taught course, I hope to have:

- Gained a better understanding of how online and face-to-face teaching differ in approach and philosophical orientation, and a fluency with how each can shine pedagogically.
- Experimented with new technologies that support active learning in a virtual environment.
- Explored low-cost equipment and software that will help me craft better educational content.
- Developed a map of teaching strategies that create vibrant online learning environments.

Course Policies

1. Course work will be flexible, ongoing, and mostly asynchronous. One advantage of online learning environments is that you can nibble away at the workload in ways that fit your life and responsibilities. So this summer, if my garden beds are overrun with dandelions or my child is cranky and needs to be put in water, I will postpone the day's assignments to weed or visit the ocean. In addition, other than the occasional live webinar on online learning, I will do most of the work asynchronously. Many professors learned the hard way last semester: Some synchronous sessions work well but trying to replicate a face-to-face classroom wholesale on Zoom is often not the best way to move a traditional class online. Asynchronous learning has many benefits besides flexibility, including greater equity, time for deep reflection, and opportunities to express yourself via writing, which is especially helpful for those who feel less comfortable speaking up in live settings.
2. Choices are aplenty. As you can see by the readings and assignments listed below, we have a buffet of offerings. I will practice autonomy in my summer studies and allow intellectual curiosity to be my guide. For my fall courses, I will offer students the same freedom and create multiple pathways for them to fulfill our learning goals.
3. Yet structure and "transparency" are key. Flexibility is important, but I also know that I won't get anything done if I don't schedule it. I will create a summer schedule with small goals leading up to larger ones and break the workload down across the weeks. Students appreciate structure and learn better in structured environments, and so will I. Likewise this summer, I'm aiming for transparency — the degree to which expectations and assignments are clear and available ahead of time — since that is important in a virtual environment.

Assigned Readings

When it comes to excellent writing and advice on teaching blended or online courses, we are lucky to have an embarrassment of riches. Below are just some of the material I plan to visit, revisit, or otherwise devour. First, the books:

- *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes,* by Flower Darby, assistant dean of online and innovative pedagogies at Northern Arizona University. The

book, written with James M. Lang, adapts the lessons of his 2016 book, *Small Teaching*, and prioritizes brief, easy ways to improve your online teaching.

- *99 Tips for Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos: A Guide for Online Teachers and Flipped Classes,* by the writer and educator Karen Costa. Undoubtedly she hoped her book would help a lot of people, but probably had no idea just *how timely* her April 2020 release would be. Filled with bite-size tips, it practices what it preaches and is peppered with useful links to video explainers and examples of the tips in action.
- *Intentional Tech: Principles to Guide the Use of Educational Technology in College Teaching,* by Derek Bruff, director of the Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. His book has been on my to-read list but lingered there a bit because I tend to be a relatively low-tech instructor. No longer!
- *Minds Online: Teaching Effectively With Technology,* by Michelle D. Miller, a professor of psychological sciences at Northern Arizona University. Her book examines how to enhance student retention and understanding by blending technology with research on the neural and cognitive underpinnings of learning.
- *The Blended Course Design Workbook,* by Kathryn E. Linder, executive director for program development at Kansas State University Global Campus. This fall, like it or not, many of us will be teaching some mix of online and face to face. Her workbook is a practical guide for designing such hybrid courses.

Even more plentiful than books on this subject are the many, many articles, blog posts, podcasts, and infographics. It's not hard to find them, so rather than a long list of links, here are a few I will be reading and studying:

- The United States, at the time of this writing, has lost more than 100,000 of our friends, lovers, parents, and children to Covid-19.
- Looking for an organizing model for your online pedagogy? Here's one that emphasizes values such as adaptability, connection, and equity.
- Maybe, like me, you've watched some professors' flashy course videos and wondered how you could be a good online teacher while still honoring your introverted self. If so, you may find some ideas in "Remote Teaching While Introverted."
- If podcasts are your style or you just need a handy way to fit more pedagogical thinking into your busy lifestyle, both the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast and Tea for Teaching have been including episodes lately about online teaching and Covid-19.
- Looking for an attractive infographic to keep by your workstation for handy reference? Two of my favorites are on humanizing your online classroom and on fostering deep reading in digital environments.
- Sometimes you just need a quick refresher. You can find useful teaching-advice guides in *The Chronicle* about a range of topics, including inclusive teaching, ed-tech choices, and syllabus design. (Full disclosure: I wrote one of them, "How to Make Your Teaching More Engaging.")

Course Assignments

I'm assigning myself a lot of small tasks this summer, but, collectively, they involve four key areas of "homework":

- Watch excellent online-teaching content. Having read Karen Costa's book and viewed some of her videos, I'm going to check out other stars of online learning, such as Michael Wesch, an associate professor of cultural anthropology at Kansas State University, and Eddie Woo, author of *It's a Numberful World: How Math Is Hiding Everywhere*. They offer both content videos and how-to advice videos.

- Play with new tech tools. My college's learning-management system has some good tools for recording videos, creating online quizzes, and the like. But I have to imagine that — just as think-pair-share starts losing its shine around late October — so, too, will online discussion boards and videos. I need to investigate some new tools, such as hypothes.is and Flipgrid. Meanwhile, Zoom — our "can't live with it, can't live without it" friend — has a host of options to make active learning possible. Check out this crowdsourced list of technology offerings to see if some of them can spice up active learning in your online classes. (For the record, I won't be testing any digital tools to spy on or police my students. I won't be requiring them to turn their cameras on during Zoom, and I won't be using remote proctoring or plagiarism-detection software.)
- Practice Universal Design and inclusive teaching. It is always important to be sure that your teaching is accessible and open to students of all identities, backgrounds, cultures, personalities, and disabilities. That is more true now than ever as we pivot online and students have mixed access to broadband, equipment, and technology. Here's a guide to being inclusive when using online technologies like Zoom.
- Find ways online to practice a pedagogy of care. Academics are prone to over-intellectualization and are often reluctant to view our work in the classroom as involving care, relationships, and emotions. But in a virtual classroom, I need to craft class policies, assignments, and assessments that maximize student engagement and minimize boredom, anxiety, and confusion, and that respect the deep need for community we all share — particularly in these times of upheaval. This summer, I joined a group of fellow writers in the teaching-and-learning series published by West Virginia University Press to develop an open-source project called Pedagogies of Care. The project, which includes videos, articles, podcasts, and infographics from the contributing authors, will be freely available to both individuals and teaching centers interested in developing teaching practices that are empirically based and student-centered.

Assessment

I probably won't be grading myself at the end of the summer. But I suppose my progress will be assessed throughout the fall semester by the degree of student learning in my courses. And I will get feedback directly from them both formatively (via mid-semester course evaluations and frequent polling check-ins) and summatively (via end-of-semester evaluations and final-exam performance).

Other Courses

Don't like the course I designed? Here are some alternatives:

- Educause offers a free, self-taught course on the fundamentals of online teaching.
- The Online Learning Consortium has developed and released a free "faculty playbook" on how to provide high-quality online instruction amid Covid-19.
- Dave Cormier ("that MOOC guy" and a learning specialist at the University of Windsor) collected a master list of even more links and online-learning resources. And check out his awesome Online Learning in a Hurry YouTube series.

Professor, Teach Thyself

I have multiple layers of privilege that make it possible for me to use this summer to enhance my online teaching skills, including tenure, enough spending money to make a few small equipment purchases, and just one child, who is a pretty self-sufficient teenager. In addition, I am not in the position of having to get a large research lab full of graduate students and postdocs back up and running in September. At my college, my promotions are based more on my teaching than on my research.

The point is: Plenty of faculty members don't enjoy such advantages, especially academics in contingent or otherwise precarious positions. If administrators expect an instructor to spend the summer in self-training or in formal training, then they should be prepared to provide the time, resources, security, and money to make that possible.

Do I long for a return to the days of grabbing a coffee with my honors student to talk about her thesis? Of course. Years ago, when I was drawn to a life of the mind, did I envision that my work would one day entail investigating wireless microphones and camera stabilizers? Of course not. I could stamp my feet and lament not being able to do things the way I've always done them. But instead, I'm going back to school this summer. My students deserve nothing less. And yours do, too.

VIDEO SERIES TO TEACH PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, & ECONOMICS

As universities ramp up online learning capabilities in response to Covid-19, the Institute for Humane Studies (IHS), an educational non-profit, is offering professors a free video series of philosophy, politics, and economics lessons.

KICK OUT MYTHS

5 Myths About Remote Teaching… www.chronicle.com

Why academics must resist the urge to use the pandemic to judge the value of online teaching.

BLACKBOARD LEARN VIDEOS

CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW TO ENJOY A FEW SHORT "HOW TO" VIDEOS FOR BLACKBOARD LEARN.

YouTube www.youtube.com

INTERACTIVE TOOLS

- Padlet
- Mindmeister
- Mentimeter
- Nearpod
- Peardeck
- Answer Garden

ONLINE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Online Assessment Strategies - ... sites.google.com

TIPS FOR BLACKBOARD ASSESSMENTS

RESOURCES PROVIDED BY THE VIRTUAL LEARNING COMMUNITY (VLC)

The **Virtual Learning Community** (**VLC**) is a collaborative effort of the **North Carolina Community College** System for developing online course content and providing support services for the benefit and success of distance learning students, educators, and eLearning administrators.

Access the Virtual Learning Community

COFFEE WITH YOUR INSTRUCTIONAL COACH

Wednesdays @ 10:00 a.m.

https://bit.ly/chatwiththecoach

Grab your coffee and join us for a morning chat. This is a great time to share ideas, pose questions and request resources.

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COFFEE WITH THE COACH

WHEN

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17TH, 10-11AM

WHERE

BLACKBOARD COLLABORATE

MORE INFORMATION

Grab your coffee and join the Instructional Coaches for a morning chat. This is a great time to share ideas, pose questions and request resources.

https://us.bbcollab.com/guest/2b6df82b335a4511a1b167930b532682

SCHEDULE A COACHING SESSION

Do you have specific questions you want to have addressed? Would you like a one-on-one conversation with your Instructional Coach to get some ideas regarding instructional strategies?

Send me an email to set up a session!

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