Instruction Ideas for Socially Distanced In-Person Courses

Take-aways from the Fall 2020 Student Learning Experiences Survey

In November 2020, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education asked undergraduate, graduate, and professional students to provide feedback about the teaching strategies instructors used in their Fall 2020 in-person courses. Derived from the most consistent and salient survey responses and supported by evidence-based teaching practices, we offer these instruction ideas and resources for faculty consideration, recognizing that you may have employed some of these practices as well as other strategies not included below. Join the Faculty Online Community for Teaching facilitated by the Center for Teaching Innovation to share additional ideas and/or questions (if you have already signed up, click here to go to the community).

Explore the results from the Fall 2020 Student Learning Experiences Survey.

Model good public health and safety practices

Help students feel comfortable in the classroom through these practices:

- physical distancing
- mask wearing
- minimum to no shared physical handling of class materials
- self-cleaning surfaces using available supplies

Provide opportunities to make your course interactive, allowing students to get to know you and one another

Students working in small groups often learn and retain more. Also, group work provides students a sense of shared purpose that can improve morale and increase motivation. In inclusive learning environments, students feel that their contributions and perspectives are equally valued and respected.

- Encourage group work in class and/or assign students to study groups or group projects (see the Learning Strategies Center's Study Group matching service)
- Change the seating periodically so that students can interact with different classmates
- Use classroom polling, (e.g., through Poll Everywhere), to engage students in course material
- When weather permits, schedule field trips or hold class outside (while maintaining distancing)
- Share some personal information so that students can get to know you
- Offer a sufficient number of in-person office-hours

Be flexible as students may have new or different needs related to remote learning in a pandemic

- Acknowledge the current challenges caused by the pandemic and show compassion (see Setting Expectations & Connecting with Students)

- Allow students to miss or drop one assignment/test of their choice (see Promoting Academic Integrity in Remote Teaching)

- Demonstrate your empathy (e.g., check-in with class to see how everyone is doing)

- Use assessments that offer some flexibility regarding due dates and participation expectations and that remove means for students to violate academic integrity (e.g., open book exams, group projects)

- Provide a short break during longer classes (but remind students to maintain safe distancing)

Provide clarity to enhance understanding of course structure and course concepts

- Provide as much clarity and transparency as possible about the weekly schedule, course expectations, learning goals, assessments, grading rubrics, Covid policies (see Communication Tips)

- Maintain an easily navigable course organization in Canvas (e.g., minimize tabs and pages to find announcements, due dates, and assignments)

- Check in with students regularly to assess whether they understand course concepts and create materials or exercises to help students understand the concepts (e.g., ungraded quizzes – see Practice with Feedback)

- At the start of a new lecture, give a brief summary of important points from the previous lecture

- Slow down when teaching complex concepts

Post course materials, such as lectures (videos or PowerPoint presentations), online

Learners are more likely to make cognitive connections when information is presented in multiple modes (see Online Teaching).

- Record lectures and post them in a timely manner to allow for review when needed

- Post course materials online