



ATG<sup>1</sup> Brief | Leadership blog post, April 2020

## **The Great Pivot: What have we learned from the rapid and total shift to remote teaching and learning?**

5 observations and 4 recommendations for faculty switching to remote instruction

By David Rosowsky, Ph.D.

The sudden shift to remote teaching and learning following the COVID-19 outbreak and global pandemic has been a remarkable experiment for students, faculty, instructional staff, IT staff, and colleges and universities. We are learning on the fly, from one another, and through trial and error, about how to teach online, how to maintain communications with students in and out of class, and how to maintain continuity in a severely fractured academic year. Whether by collective intention or not, schools have largely stayed away from assessment of teaching during this crisis and our ‘transition semester.’ This is not the time, that time will come later. What are the five key lessons learned through this great experiment in online (remote) teaching and learning? (Remember, it’s not just online, taught in purpose-specific digital production studios. Faculty are teaching from their homes.)

1. Faculty are more adaptive than they may have thought. They are resourceful, responsive, and committed to effective teaching through these new modalities.
2. As digital natives, most students are able to quickly adapt.
3. Faculty have not universally found university centers for teaching and learning and the divisions responsible for distance and online education to be necessary for making this pivot successfully. By contrast, IT staff (often at the unit level) have been the most essential and most helpful.
4. There are equity issues we must take into account when thinking about teaching online to remotely located students. Not all students have the same access to conditions, equipment, or services to make the move to online learning. Family settings and conditions vary. Access to computers and high-speed internet vary. Demands beyond schoolwork vary.

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<sup>1</sup> *Across the Green* was started as a series of periodic letters from Provost Rosowsky to provide updates on current initiatives and information on topics of interest to the broader UVM academic community. Started in 2013, *Across the Green* was published three times per year during the six years Dr. Rosowsky served as UVM’s Provost and Senior Vice President. The *ATG Brief* series continues in the spirit of this communication with topics focused on higher education and leadership.

5. Best practices are easily discovered, shared, and implemented on our digital platforms. Many faculty are eager to share what works. In some cases, it is proving far easier (and faster) to rely on our own capabilities rather than engage with a complex and costly enterprise system. While not optimal (for a variety of reasons), this arose out of necessity during this crisis. And it seems to work.

What I've learned from speaking with faculty colleagues around the country, at a range of different institution types, can be summarized in four key recommendations for faculty switching to remote instruction:

1. Experiment with different modalities, different technologies, and different blends of pedagogy. (Your smart phone can serve as a pretty good scanner!) Share materials in advance of the class, and use your virtual face-time for discussion. Ask colleagues how they are getting students to engage virtually with the class. Some great ideas out there.
2. Communicate up front to students that you recognize their settings may not be ideal and that you can be flexible and accommodating on assignments, etc. Be sure everyone has a computer and access to high-speed internet. If they don't, work with the university to provide assistance or help identify alternatives.
3. Set expectations for yourself as the instructor lower than you would for your on-campus course, at least for the first time through. I give myself a grade after each class and track my progress (and my misses). I started at a C- and have moved up to a solid B+. (My students, be comparison, have been A+ throughout. They are patient, flexible, and forgiving. They are also really grateful.)
4. Enjoy the ride. You are back in school again, learning something new. Your experiences and your new skills will be valuable when you return to the classroom and our students return to our campuses. You will have a greater appreciation for alternate modes of instructional delivery, for the flexibility online teaching can provide both you and your students, and you will be able to incorporate technology-based content delivery, office hours, and even advising into your faculty role.

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