

From: [Center for Faculty Innovation](#)
To: TEACHING-TOOLBOX@LISTSERV.JMU.EDU
Bcc: [Brantmeier, Edward James - brantmej](#)
Subject: Teaching Toolbox: Helping Students Make the Transition to Online Learning
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Helping Students Make the Transition to Online Learning

by Emily O. Gravett

Hi friends-

This is obviously a very different Toolbox than the one we thought we'd be sending out just a few weeks ago. The CFI teaching team had a variety of Toolbox topics planned for after Spring Break until the end of the semester, but we've decided to shift focus, given the evolving [COVID-19](#) global pandemic.

First and foremost, we hope that you and your loved ones are safe and healthy. Nothing is of greater concern to us. Second, the teaching team, and the broader CFI, is working hard to provide the sorts of support that would be helpful to you at this unusual time. Look for information about CFI programming, including new, adjusted, and cancelled offerings, in Monday's Digest (March 23, 2020). Third, to maintain some semblance of normalcy, we still wanted to send out a Toolbox today, one we hope is relevant to you now.

The listserv for folks who staff faculty development centers like the CFI has seen a flurry of activity since the seriousness of the COVID-19 outbreak became known. Our primary job is to support faculty, like you, and there has never been such urgent need for this kind of support. Faculty are wondering how to transition courses online (see the [Libraries guide](#)), how to homeschool their children, how to work remotely, how to support local businesses, how to access credible news, how to mitigate the emotional and mental toll this crisis is taking, and how to ensure the safety of loved ones around the globe.

But, of course, faculty are not the only ones adapting to new and challenging circumstances. Students are too. An important thread on this listserv has wondered how we can help a diverse student body, with varying needs, adjust to learning online, when so many students did not sign up for an online class in the first place and may have never taken one in college thus far.

Fortunately, JMU Libraries has prepared a series of resources just for students called "[Temporary Online Teaching and Learning Guide: For Students](#)" (which includes a link to "[Simple Steps to Success in Remote Learning](#)"). In addition to these internal webpages, a number of other universities have put together guides to help students make the transition to learning online, which include advice for managing time, staying motivated, studying actively, maintaining connections, and more. I plan to give my own students these links too: "[Help - All of My Classes Suddenly Went Online!](#)" ([Indiana University - Bloomington](#)), "[Adjusting Your Study Habits during COVID](#)" ([University of Michigan](#)), and "[Tips for Success When Learning Online](#)" ([VCU](#)). There are also whole texts devoted to this topic (like [Learning to Learn Online, 2018](#)), which I can't imagine anyone reading at this point, but which I'm linking here anyway, in case anyone returns to this Toolbox later on, when things have settled down

a bit. The advice shared across these various resources includes conveying the following messages to students:

- Take care of yourself
- Practice flexibility, open-mindedness, and patience; professors are adapting too and things won't be perfect
- Look for communications from your university and your professors regularly
- Familiarize yourself with any updated course materials (like the syllabus)
- Identify and plan for any new tasks, deadlines, etc. that have emerged
- Check your technology capacities and let your instructors know of any limitations or barriers, upfront and if/when they arise
- Find a comfortable place where you can do your work
- Generate plans/ideas for staying motivated and disciplined
- Ask if you are unsure (e.g., how to submit assignments, get participation points, etc.)
- Seek support from your classmates and other communities you belong to
- Give yourself more time than you think you'll need for *everything*
- Advocate for yourself if you are struggling and need help

We instructors might also consider explicitly integrating this kind of advice and assistance into our newly adapted online courses. For instance, we could begin next week with a simple check-in, focusing on how students are doing (vs. immediately diving back into content), to affirm that their well-being is top priority. We could include a unit in which students try out necessary technologies and get support from us in doing so. We could include a lesson in which we help students develop a work schedule/plan. (I know I need to do this too!) This may be an unintended side effect of this situation: attention to “meta-cognition” and “self-regulation” (which we touched upon in a previous [Teaching Toolbox](#)). It may also be a reminder of the [“human dimension”](#) of all significant learning experiences.

For now, I'll end with what Russ Hunt, Professor Emeritus at St. Thomas University, [wrote on the listserv](#):

“It is possible, I think, to create an actual cooperative relationship, focused on learning, in the context of this struggle to continue in spite of shutdowns and sickness. When teachers trying to move their teaching to a new situation, are invited to tell students what they're trying to do, and why, and why it is that they may be having trouble, and to ask their

students for advice -- and even more when students are invited, in the interests of learning (not grades, perhaps), to tell their teachers how they can help, and what they're doing that isn't helping . . . well, who knows, in the midst of this collaborative problem solving, some real education might occur."

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For more information about the Toolboxes, please visit:

<https://www.jmu.edu/cfi/teaching/other/teaching-toolbox.shtml>