Dear Colleagues,

I’d like to share a few updates and a couple of requests to best respond to what you need.

All Students Now Added to UMSL Canvas Course on How to Learn Online

As of Friday, all students were added to a Canvas resource course designed to help students succeed in an online course environment. If you need to buy yourself a little more time to prepare your course(s), consider asking students to spend this week only going through this orientation course to get ready to learn online starting March 30. For students who’ve never taken an online class, this time away from instruction (this week and spring break) will also help students determine how they can get access to a computer and the internet while also ensuring their families are taken care of. Engaging them instead in this “How to Learn Online” course will keep them engaged but also build their confidence to settle into the rest of the semester.

Just put this link in an announcement or perhaps even an assignment giving them this week to complete it: https://umsl.instructure.com/courses/15933. If you’re teaching in the second 8-week session, consider giving students 1-2 days to go through this site rather than a full week.

We adapted this resource to include language acknowledging the anxiety they may be feeling about a sudden switch to online. This course shows students how to prepare the technology they might use in your courses, understand expectations that have been set, and learn ways to overcome common obstacles. Also, students will learn how to navigate Canvas and try out some of the online tools they might use to complete assignments.

Please encourage your students to use this resource so you don’t have to take on the added pressure of orienting them to online learning and Canvas all on your own. For students who’ve never taken an online class, this time will help students determine how they can get access to a computer and the internet while also ensuring their families are taken care of.
Reminder: Campus Will Remain Open to Students, Faculty and Staff

Though UMSL has suspended all in-person classes for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester to be taught remotely, the university will remain open and operational, including computer labs, advising offices, academic support services, tutoring centers, libraries, residence halls and dining services to ensure students can continue their education from wherever best suits their individual needs. The Recreation and Wellness Center will be closed. Plans for final exams and commencements will be communicated as decisions are made. Supervisors should continue to plan for remote work options should they become necessary. View UMSL’s COVID-19 webpage for details.

Do Your Students Need Access to Software?

Let ITS know what software your students need access to by completing this form: https://forms.gle/oHrsXXHEX3daYHqGA. Our colleagues in ITS are working to help faculty and students have access to instructional software critical to instruction. UMSL provides online access to software through a virtual system called TritonApps that runs software via a browser. There are some programs in TritonApps but not all of the software installed in computer labs is in TritonApps. Please fill out this form to let ITS know which computer lab software needs to be put into TritonApps.

Great news from Adobe! UMSL ITS has already completed the paperwork to be included in Adobe’s offer to make the Adobe Creative Cloud software (Photoshop, InDesign, Acrobat Pro, Premiere, Illustrator) available virtually to students. We hope to hear from Adobe if we’re included next week. This offer would provide free online access to these tools through May 31, 2020.

According to this article, Charter shared that it will open WiFi hotspots across the
country for public use and will offer free Spectrum broadband service and WiFi access for 60 days to households with K-12 or college students (that do not already have Spectrum broadband service) at any level up to 100 Mbps, waiving installation fees for those new student households. The company said it will partner with schools to get the word out. Perhaps other internet providers will offer similar access.

**Need Equipment? Plans are in the Works**

We know that not everyone has the technology needed at home to learn and teach online. ITS is taking inventory of classroom laptops to check out to students, faculty and staff. They are also determining how to establish a process for requesting a laptop for immunocompromised community members, students who have limited access to computers, and those with a critical need. Once the plan is in place, we’ll learn more about where/how/when to make these requests.

In the meantime, faculty are encouraged to use campus resources such as recording rooms in the CTL and webcam-equipped classrooms. If your students are asking where to go to check out a laptop, please direct them to the appropriate advising office who will be engaged in the process.

The CTL has ordered 20 inexpensive webcams and a couple of portable document cameras, and other recording equipment to check out to faculty who need to record lectures or instructional videos. The webcams are expected to arrive early next week.

**Canvas Equation Editor (Equatio) on the Near Horizon**

UMSL ITS has been working to find better support for faculty who teach with mathematical symbols. Equatio will be added to Canvas early next week to allow faculty and students the ability to more easily type mathematical equations, formulas, graphs and more.


**Flexibility is the Name of the Game**

Plans are changing, and we are all thinking about what we want to accomplish in the remaining weeks of the semester. We rarely are asked or even encouraged to re-examine or change our syllabi at mid-semester. The circumstance we find ourselves in means that we must adapt and adjust our expectations. I know that’s not always comfortable. I’d like to encourage you to consider these potential points of strain to consider how we might find a balance.

1) **Online Testing: Consider Alternatives**

I would like to ask you to reconsider the need for proctored exams until final exams. The Campus Testing Center remains open but space is extremely limited and cannot
accommodate whole class testing or the sudden influx of test takers. Though we have made use of online remote proctoring systems like ProctorU for students who’ve chosen to take online courses, it is a pay-per-exam service and costs could easily spiral out of control. Here are a few reasons why I ask:

- This cloud technology system, like many across the country, might not be able to easily handle the sudden influx of nearly every university moving suddenly to online.

- Students are stressed, just as you are. They’re anxious about the pandemic, about how successful they’ll be in a different learning environment, and about how they might even access the internet or computing technology. Adding the stress of a high-stakes exam in a technology platform that requires they install an extension in their browser, meet a stranger via webcam, and be recorded while taking the exam in a quiet room, like their bedroom, is an additional layer of stress that might put some over the edge.

- Any proctoring solution including ProctorU requires 48 hours to get the instructor account verified and exam set up. Then students need to schedule their exam session 72 hours in advance otherwise they’re charged a late-registration fee. This is not going to be a solution for exams next week.

There’s a group of creative people working on how we can provide solutions to faculty who need to proctor exams because of accreditation requirements in the discipline. In the meantime, perhaps you might reconsider the need for proctoring. Consider the alternatives attached to this email.

2) Zoom: But Let Canvas Be Your Solid Plan

We hope Zoom can handle every university instructor across the world suddenly hosting class sessions in real time, however, I’d recommend a solid plan that relies on Canvas. There are reports of Zoom struggling to handle the load, and although I haven’t noticed any loss in performance, this may occur. Organizing your course in Canvas in thematic or weekly modules (with links to readings, assignments, videos) will help you breathe a sigh of relief if your carefully planned Zoom session is interrupted. Putting your materials in Canvas also reduces stress on students who may not be able to meet with the rest of the class in Zoom. Providing materials and activities in Canvas provides flexibility to students who then can log in at times when they’re able to find a place to access a computer or the Internet.

3) Zoom for Supplemental Instruction

If your course is supported by the CTL Supplemental Instruction (SI) program, you may like knowing that Jenna Alexander’s proactive steps have resulted in our SI leaders ready to jump in to offer SI online via Zoom. She made this fantastic handout with tips about running effective meetings in Zoom that she agreed I could share more broadly with faculty. Here you go!

Please connect students to online tutoring services (see attachment)
The University Tutoring Center (UTC) is implementing additional online tutorial support for students. By Friday, March 20, students can receive tutorial support from UTC-trained tutors through an additional online tutoring platform. Students will log into their Canvas course and select Triton Online Tutoring to receive drop-in tutorial support in a variety of courses. In addition, UTC will train more tutors to utilize this online format for paired peer and alumni tutoring sessions. To ensure students have access to this service, faculty should add the Triton Online Tutoring button to their Canvas Navigation Bar. Please follow the attached instructions to add this extension.

How to Keep Teaching and Keep Learning

- Canvas has a wonderful set of easy to follow guides for instructors - check these out! They have a set of guides for students, too.

- We continue to update our UMSL Keep Teaching and Keep Learning websites as we find tips, links and resources to help your pivot to remote teaching possible.

- Please seek help by attending one of our workshops or by setting up a meeting with an online instructional designer by sending an email to a closely monitored email account keeplearning@umsystem.edu.

Advice from the Trenches

In parting, I share a few resources from faculty at other universities. These resonated with me and I thought they might with you.

From Rice University's CTL: Inclusion, Equity and Access while Teaching Remotely, As you prepare to move classes online, consider sending all students a survey to better understand their needs and preferences for remote instruction. It may not be possible to accommodate all of their needs or requests, but the results can be used to inform the choices you make about remote instruction, and will help students feel that you’re taking their personal situations into consideration.

Astronomy faculty member Andrew Heuvel shares 10 Tips for First-Time Online Faculty...Suddenly Forced to Teaching Online in a Global Pandemic.

Amy Young, a Media Studies faculty member at Washington State, attended a workshop on moving courses online as quickly as we are.

1. Be kind to yourself and your students. Everyone is stressed, even if they're playing cool.

2. Many universities have a considerable number of pedagogical experts that,
quite frankly, I have only been dimly aware of until yesterday.

3. You will not recreate your classroom, and you cannot hold yourself to that standard. Moving a class to a distance learning model in a day's time excludes the possibility of excellence. Give yourself a break.

4. Prioritize. What do students REALLY NEED TO KNOW? This one is hard for me. But we have to strip it all the way down--in my campaigns class, that means I need them to post infographics on their research and now post narrative context and slides. But I'm going to punt on presentations because we just don't have time. Which sucks. But these are not normal circumstances.

5. If you're making videos, student viewership drops off precipitously at 5 minutes.

6. Make assignments lower or no stakes if you're using a new platform. Get students used to just using the platform. Then you can do something higher stakes. Do not ask students to do a high stakes exam or assignment on a new platform.

7. Stay in contact with students, and stay transparent. Talk to them about WHY you're prioritizing certain things or asking them to read or do certain things. I've moved to doing that in all of my face-to-face teaching anyway, and it improves student buy-in because they know content and delivery are purposeful.

8. Do not read on best practices for distance learning. That's not the situation we're in. We're in triage. Distance learning, when planned, can be really excellent. That's not what this is. Do what you absolutely have to and ditch what you can. Thinking you can manage best practices in a day or a week will lead to feeling like you've failed.

9. Be particularly kind to your graduating seniors. They're already panicking, and this isn't going to help. If you teach a class where they need to have completed something for certification, to apply to grad school, or whatever, figure out plan B. But talk to them. Radio silence, even if you're working, is not okay.

Thank you for all you are doing, and please take Amy's advice - be kind to yourself and those around you.

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