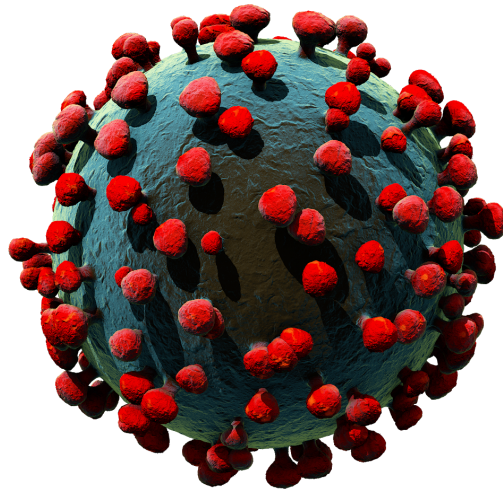


COVID-19 & Student Affairs

Supporting and Engaging Students when Instruction has
Temporarily Moved Online



Dr. Jaimie Hoffman
Vice President for Student Affairs and Learning
jhoffman@noodle.com



Introduction

As [campuses abruptly close their doors](#) and move instruction online to reduce the spread of COVID-19, several resources have been shared in the academic community (some of which are linked at the end of this document) for faculty on teaching in the online environment. It is also important to think about, and plan for, supporting and engaging students online. To foster practices that are effective for students studying online, campuses may need to adjust the ways in which they have delivered support services and student engagement activities to onground students in the past.

This document is designed to give campus student affairs personnel, like you, an idea of where to start when working with students who are no longer on the physical campus. We present some of the key adjustments that you may want to make, acknowledging that the lift is quite heavy, and we provide ideas for additional enhancement if you have the bandwidth. We first present thoughts on how to make ground-based student support services available to students learning remotely and then offer suggestions on thinking through student development and engagement services.

The Virtual Campus

While the circumstances are not ideal, we have an opportunity to think about the virtual campus environment that our students encounter. We see the Learning Management (LMS) as the Virtual Campus since it is the place where students are accessing their coursework. Think about the presence student support services have in your LMS. Most LMSs are structured around “courses” -- It might be useful to set up a “Virtual Student Center” course in the LMS where students can access support materials, services, and learn about engagement opportunities (this might even be the space you could foster discussion with, and among, students). You might include a page in your LMS course for each of your support services where they can explain how on ground services are going to be available online, a spot for important announcements, and discussion to foster engagement among students; providing an Ask & Answer discussion thread within the course discussion space for students to post their questions and see the questions from others (and help each other!) might also be useful for managing the frequently asked questions while building community.

Unique challenges of learning remotely

Just like your world is changing with not having students in front of you, students are experiencing a significant shift in their experience as a learner. Something to consider is that students learning online can feel isolated and disconnected due to the lack of social interaction with peers (Lehman & Conceicao, 2014). Additionally, students studying online want clear expectations, ease of access to campus processes, and quick response times (Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche, Edwards, 2009 & Mupinga, Nora, Yaw, 2006). Provided in the chart below are some quick steps (in the “essential” column) and, if you have more time, some additional steps (in the “enhancement column”) are provided that could benefit your students. The text below the chart elaborates on the text in the chart.



Essential Steps	Next Steps/Additional Enhancements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Aggregate a list of technology resources students can use for class✓ Make sure the email accounts and phones for support services are monitored✓ Review office response protocol (timeliness of responses and staffing coverage)✓ Ensure Judicial and Title IX processes can be conducted virtually✓ Confirm that academic processes can be completed remotely✓ Determine and communicate available tech support✓ Confirm that students can pay their bills and access financial aid packages online✓ Verify that students can request a copy of their records (and have them mailed), and sign a FERPA release online✓ Analyze student health insurance applicability for off campus use; consider telehealth services✓ Confirm that disability support services can support students remotely✓ Discuss how mental health support can be provided to students remotely and determine crisis response protocol✓ Consider ways student assistants can work from home to ensure continuity of their wages✓ Communicate early and often about commencement plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Provide video conferencing, calendaring, and social engagement tools (and training) for staff✓ Research using chatbots to answer tier 1 questions✓ Use calendaring tools (and share links with students) for them to schedule synchronous meetings✓ Determine what data points you need to gather to evaluate the effectiveness of your efforts so you can adjust as you go✓ Create an onboarding course to orient students to learning online✓ Determine the viability of providing the following services in a remote format:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Veteran’s services○ Career services○ Equity and inclusion services○ Tutoring○ Textbook shipping○ Degree tracking○ Academic advising○ Library services○ IRB training○ Thesis/dissertation committees○ Student organization meetings and trainings○ Student organization elections○ Campus events✓ Consider creating a virtual student union space for students to engage with each other



Making On Ground Support Services Accessible for Students Learning Online

General Considerations

Student technology access

It's likely that not all students have access to computers or the internet to access their courses online. Aggregate campus resources (e.g., laptops students can check out) or a suggested list of other options (e.g., using video conference apps on phones or just making phone calls) and make that list available for students as an important first step.

Support modality

Ideally, the campus personnel supporting students learning online have the technology to support and engage those students. Email and phone are the first go-to mechanisms for connectivity and for ensuring the students are served. If possible, to add an element of humanization, include opportunities for video conferencing or other tools that allow for interactivity (including polls, breakout sessions, etc.). If you are able to offer video conferencing, you might start with critical campus support services (e.g. disability support, financial aid, personal counseling, academic advising, tutoring library services).

Response time

Online students— especially those unfamiliar with an online learning environment— can feel isolated. Waiting for responses to their questions and inquiries can be very frustrating since they can not opt to walk into an office in person. On top of this, they expect fast response times. This is a good time to evaluate response protocol and staffing coverage to ensure students receive timely (ideally within 24 hours, but obviously we have to do the best we can) responses. Consider adding chatbot support functions (like [GeckoEngage](#)) to your websites for [tier 1](#) support so that staff time can be dedicated to individualized issues.

Calendaring tools

In the event that students do want to speak with someone synchronously, it's helpful to use an automatic scheduling tool (e.g. [Calendly](#) or [Youcanbookme](#)) to plan for meetings with critical campus support services (e.g. disability support, financial aid, personal counseling, academic advising, tutoring library services).

Staff training

If you are introducing any new technology for staff during this period, provide training to help staff feel more confident using it. If you want and are able to go one step further, add a training in calendaring tools and digital tools to foster social engagement (e.g. Slack).



Frequent and Accurate Communication

Now is a good time to determine the frequency, point person, and method (e.g. website update, email, etc.) for communicating updates to students. Inundating students with communication can be confusing and overwhelming and may cause students to miss important information. Too little communication can be frustrating and anxiety-provoking. It can be helpful to anticipate what information the students will need as the end of the term approaches (e.g. student organization elections, commencement, etc.) and communicate this in advance. Similarly, share with students what support and engagement opportunities are available to them while they are studying remotely to help them stay connected to the campus community.

Student Assistants

Most student assistants rely upon their wages to pay their bills and campus closures will prevent them from coming to work. You might want to think out of the box and implement work from home practices for student assistants - consider ways they can help with tier 1 student support by answering email or holding videoconference office hours. There are lots of [great resources](#) available for managing remote workers that could also apply to student assistants.

Assessment

Consider establishing a plan to assess the impact and effectiveness of your efforts so you can make adjustments as you go. If you're short on time, consider your goals in serving students during this period and focus any assessment in that area. For instance, you could identify a way to document student contacts with the office so you can track response times -- a CRM can assist with this, but a simple google form could work too. For engagement activities, you could count attendees at a virtual meeting and pop up a poll at the end to gather students' satisfaction with the experience.

Academic processes

In this digital age, a majority of administrative processes can already be completed digitally, but it's worth checking on yours (examples include add, drop, leave of absence, bill payment, etc.). Students may need to access transcripts, especially if they're close to graduation (and wanting to go to grad school) so think about how to process this virtually. If there's anything students have to sign, explore a tool like DocuSign.

Academic Advising

If students do need to meet with an academic advisor, they may want to do so virtually. Check in with the academic advisors to plan for coverage as registration timelines approach.

Counseling & Mental Health Support Services

While we certainly hope that students stay as healthy as possible during this unique time period, preparing for students who may need mental health support should be a priority. The following are some considerations to keep in mind:



- Campus emergency personnel may want to define a plan they will follow if they feel a student is at risk. This may include agreeing that the university will notify the local police in the student's area of residence if there is an emergency.
- Consider how you might be able to provide crisis and continued mental health support for students. This is a challenge since many on campuses are not prepared to support students via online counseling. More importantly, *licensure requirements for personal counselors prohibit counseling students who are not in the same state as the counselor.*
- Campuses could consider leveraging online support resources prepared to assess students in crisis and provide continued mental health support for students. Examples of such companies are [Impact Solutions](#), [Compsych](#), [Empathia](#), and [WellConnect: Student Assistance](#). Campuses could also contact their Employee Assistance Programs to see if they would be able to offer their services to students.

FERPA

While this won't be a frequent ask of students, they may need to request a copy of their records online and receive them in the mail or they may need to sign a FERPA release online.

Disability Support Services

Student disability resources is an area you may want to prioritize to ensure compliance with laws and regulations. Consider the following:

- Students need to be able to register their disability online.
- Students need to be able to speak with a disability counselor virtually; you might think through the various modalities that students might need to communicate. It is worth noting that [Zoom](#) has the capacity for live captioning and services like [CaptioningStar](#) will provide live captioning.
- Faculty may need assistance with providing necessary accommodations in the online setting (this might include video captioning).

Financial aid/billing

Financial aid and billing are likely already accessible online, but it would not hurt to check that students can view their financial aid package online and pay their bill online. It is probably timely to anticipate any student-aid related needs applicable to summer enrollment.

Graduate Student Services

If you have a large number of graduate students, think through how students might access IRB training, grant search tools, and some graduate student-specific services virtually. Even more so, ensuring that thesis/dissertation committees can convene remotely and signatures can be completed electronically will alleviate anxiety among graduate students.

Health Services

Students who have campus health insurance will need guidance on how to leverage their health insurance if they are not able to come to the campus health center. Many college and university health centers use [FoneMed](#) for after-hours health services; this service provides students with triage support for their issues,



possibly eliminating the need for unnecessary doctor visits. [Teladoc](#), [HealthiestYou](#) and [Timely MD](#) are services that offer telehealth (much like FoneMed) for students with Student Health Insurance. These are resources that support personnel can share with online students.

Library Services

Students may already have experience using digital resources from the library while others may have relied on coming to the campus. Prepare for students to access a librarian for support and offering virtual workshops to help make the student experience smoother.

Orientation/onboarding

Where possible, provide guidance for students to onboard them to the online learning environment. This can be delivered through the LMS and would ideally include the following:

- Staying motivated as an online learner
- Time management
- Navigating the LMS (check out your LMS help pages for useful links and videos)
 - How to submit assignments
 - Where to find course content
 - Using the mobile app
- Using collaborative tools like google docs
- Key points of netiquette in asynchronous discussions and via synchronous video chat
- Support services
 - Library
 - Technical assistance
 - Disability support resources
 - Tutoring or writing support
 - Academic advising
 - Career services
 - Financial aid
 - Counseling services

Student Conduct/Title IX

While we might hope that students wouldn't need to access these services (e.g. Title IX allegations) between now and when your campus reopens, it's wise to start thinking about how you would handle them if they did.

Some things to consider are listed below:

- Students are able to virtually attend conduct and judicial hearings
- Students can sign any judicial-related paperwork online
- Students are able to submit code of conduct or Title IX allegations online (ideally confidentially if needed)
- Code of Conduct handbook is available on campus website (we are guessing this is a given for most campuses)



Technology Support

Given the new paradigm of using technology to “go to class,” students may need more help with technology. Create a plan for staffing technology support services and communicate those services to students. Some students might need to access research software and discipline-specific technology so it would be good to think through how to provide that remotely, via server, etc. If you need help with providing tech support, you can contact one of our providers, [InSource Services Group, Inc.](#)

Textbooks

As students prepare for the summer term, they may be thinking about where to purchase textbooks. This isn’t an urgent need, but it’s a good idea to determine if textbooks are available to be shipped to students.

Writing Support/Tutoring

Students will not be able to come to campus to receive tutoring and it will be more difficult for them to support each other. You might consider ensuring that students have access to tutoring via webcam. Firms like [Wyzant](#) tutoring and [Heartful Editor](#) can help with this.

Veteran's Services

Consider providing student veterans with virtual gatherings for veterans to connect, access to information about their benefits online, and talk virtually with veteran support personnel.



Student Development & Engaging Students Learning Online

Career Development Services

Students will likely still want support from career services. You may want to provide the opportunity for students to meet with a career counselor virtually and consider providing online career based workshops and career fair opportunities if available.

Campus Events & Social Engagement

Students will likely feel isolated from their peers and will enjoy connecting online. If possible, foster community through events hosted via video conferencing or even create a “Virtual Student Union” (VSU).” This could be created in the “Virtual Student Center” course discussion board or you might consider creating a Slack community to foster social engagement. We will share some resources that might help with this initiative. This is where student affairs professionals can get creative and leverage some best practices for remote workers who engage socially.

Commencement

It goes without saying that a significant amount of planning and resources go into planning commencement for all involved. Communicating early and often about the status is important for graduating seniors who are anxious to plan ahead.

Equity and Inclusion

Being displaced from campus can be difficult for any students. This is especially true for those from historically marginalized populations. It would be great if students could have continued support from campus personnel who understand intersections of identity. Even better would be if those personnel were available to meet with students virtually and coordinate virtual gatherings to connect.

Student Organizations & Student Government

Student engagement is likely not the first area you will address, but given the time of year we’re in (e.g. elections, officer transitions, and award ceremonies), spending a bit of time planning how student organization-related needs are met could pay off. Ideally student organizations will be able to offer meetings and gatherings virtually - they may need your help -- especially with the technology. Also consider:

- Elections can occur virtually using online polling software.
- Officer transition documents can be aggregated online and trainings/events could be held online.
- Award ceremonies can be held virtually, with announcements and web conferencing links sent out far in advance for attendees to secure their time. Awards can be mailed to recipients..



Please note: companies or products noted in this document are provided as an example only.



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Resources

RISE Rubric

Noodle Partners Student Affairs created a [rubric](#) for the agile campus--a place that creates a seamless, robust community where students and faculty connect with one another academically and socially and can find the tools and resources necessary to be successful in the program. The purpose of this rubric is to develop an assessment of the status of the online student experience, and in particular, of the services and support currently available to online students at this campus. Assessing services against this rubric can help us identify where gaps exist and prioritize where we can develop a more seamless, agile experience.

Other Resources

- [7 Best Practices for COVID-19-Necessitated Online Meetings](#) by Joshua Kim with Inside Higher Ed
- [Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases](#) by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources and Guidance](#) hosted on ACE Engage (new users can log in using their .edu email address)
- [Remote Teaching Resources for Business Continuity](#) created by Daniel Stanford, Director of Faculty Development and Technology Innovation in DePaul University's Center for Teaching and Learning
- [Emergency Remote Teaching Guidelines](#) by EmergeTeaching
- [Going Online in a Hurry: What to Do and Where to Start](#) created by Michelle D. Miller with The Chronicle of Higher Education