Reflections on the Online Initiative during the Pandemic

The updated CUNY - Hostos Online Learning Preparedness Course "Are You Ready?"

News and Events.
- Innovation Chase
- Online Learning Initiative Ongoing
- Updated "Are You Ready?" course
- Innovation Celebration
- Panopto Lecture Capture

Workshops.
- Blackboard
- Zoom and Collaborate
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- And more...

Articles.
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- Reflections on Online Learning
- Reflections About My Summer Experience
- How to Present Effectively Online
- Remote Educational Technology

Office of Academic Affairs
Office of Educational Technology
EdTech Innovation Celebration

Each semester we celebrate our campus EdTech Innovators—everyone who’s using technology to explore new pedagogical approaches. Among those honored are the winners of The EdTech Innovation Chase. EdTech Innovation Chase is a digital badge recognition system established to motivate faculty to engage in professional development, to promote continuous improvement and innovative practices, and to foster a culture of excellence in teaching and learning that advances student success.

For more information about the EdTech Innovation Chase, go to:

https://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/achievements/

We applaud you for being the first, for developing best practices yourself (because maybe you’re doing something nobody else has). For the epic win, innovate in the most EdTech categories and (most importantly!) help your colleagues level up. The ultimate award will be yours. This end-of-the semester event is to have FUN with technology, celebrate faculty success, and meet other innovators on campus.
At the start of the Covid 19 crisis, when CUNY decided to move to all-distance instruction, The Office of Educational Technology, the office responsible for providing faculty and training in online course development and pedagogy through the Online Learning Initiative. This included a series of workshops established with the goal of training faculty in Blackboard tools, especially Collaborate Ultra, Blackboard’s live video streaming application from March 16th and extended until August 20th.

A continuity plan was developed which included continued EdTech team operations on extended schedules from remote locations. Virtual phones were set up to allow EdTech to provide support. A total of 67 Laptop computers were loaned out to faculty. Support to faculty was continued without interruption at its normal high level.

Below is the data on one-to-one support:
- 658 (non-unique)
- 195 (unique)

As part of the plan an extensive training program was begun including workshops open to all.

For students, several workshops were offered. Over 800 students completed the Are You Ready? online learning preparedness course during this period, while over 700 students so far have taken the new Are You Ready? course.

The following is the data reflecting the extent of faculty participation in the workshops:
- Several workshops to assist with the transition (March 16th to August 20th)
  - 65 workshops
  - 194 faculty (non-unique)
  - 20 faculty (unique)

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Hybrid & Asynchronous Initiatives
As of Spring 2020, 398 (223 unique) developers, 115 (82 unique) hybrid and 237 (170 unique) asynchronous/synchronous courses were developed:
- 4 faculty members developed new courses in Fall 2019
- 155 (unique) faculty members participated in Spring and June 2020
- 27 from ALH
- 20 from BSC
- 15 from BUS
- 23 from EDU
- 55 from HUM
- 13 from ENG
- 11 from L&C
- 22 from MAT
- 35 from NAS

Each initiative counted with faculty mentors/instructional design consultants and EdTech instructional design specialists
- May: 12 faculty, 4 EdTech specialists (1 part time)
June: 26 faculty, 6 EdTech specialists (2 part time)
July: 7 faculty, 3 EdTech specialists (1 part time)
August: 7 faculty, 3 EdTech specialists (1 part time)
Faculty members from ETLC evaluated courses submitted for certification
Usual # of evaluations per AY is about 30
Almost 500 evaluations done during this summer
Initiatives were designed with built-in pre and post surveys
Pre survey: 311 faculty
Post survey: 196 faculty

Responses from the pre- and post-surveys were used to make improvements to subsequent initiatives.

### How would you rate your familiarity and experience with Learning Management Systems (e.g. Blackboard) in general?
**Range Effective to Expert (%)**

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### How would you rate your proficiency in creating effective learning unit structures in Blackboard?
**Range Effective to Expert (%)**

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How would you rate your proficiency in creating effective learning unit structures in Blackboard? Range Effective to Expert ( % )

This course was very helpful in preparing me for teaching an online course. ( % )
It has been an intense Summer in terms of training and adapting a vast variety of courses to function in an online environment. Along the way there have been several common denominator issues that should be emphasized. This is not all in the same scope, but they are all important in their own way. These are my thoughts and suggestions:

- Use the student preview
- Find ways to get the students to log in to your course more often
- Have backup plans for sharing content, meetings, and the unexpected
- Know your options
- Experiment and practice the tools you use

Use the student preview
The student preview feature (located at the top right of the Blackboard screen) is a very important step in the process of development of both preplanning and ongoing courses. An instructor almost always sees everything and the student view is very different. After creating an assignment, posting an announcement, or adding a test, it is important to click that button to confirm what the student sees.

Find ways to get the students to log in to your course more often
Whether the course is synchronous or asynchronous homework is pretty universal. The question is, should the student get the assignment, work on predominantly offline and then turn it in? Or can they be more engaged with the material in a collaborative or interactive way? Should they have smaller, more frequent exercises to work on or bigger ones that require feedback at regular intervals? The right answer here is inevitably the one that works for you and benefits the students. No matter how this is accomplished, consistent interaction with the coursework has been shown to be the most significant deciding factor in a student’s comprehension and use of what they have learned.

Have backup plans for sharing content, meetings, and the unexpected
The more things change, the more they stay the same. If I plan on sharing my screen to give students a value added review of material, I have the presentation unloaded for them to see it better, make their own comments or if need be to use that if I have a technical issue. If I have a meeting planned on Blackboard Collaborate, I have a link ready to start a Zoom meeting (or vice versa). As for the unexpected? Well maybe I don’t have a planned response this time, but I will next time and in the long run that helps a lot.

Know your options
If I only know 1 out of 5 things I can do to solve a problem, that 1 is always going to be my choice, I might even think it’s the best choice and maybe it is, but if I know all 5 and still choose that first option things might just go more smoothly. Blackboard has a lot of tools, LMSes in general have a lot of tools and I definitely do not need all of them. Knowing your options is always better and admittedly this can take time, but different departments have different needs and maybe through trial and error a tool you haven’t tried before might be more effective or fit your personal teaching style better.

Experiment and practice the tools you use
Ostensibly, this overlaps with ‘knowing your options’ but it goes beyond knowing and enters into personal ownership and control of how a particular exercise or task proceeds in class. In a sandbox, development shell, or even in a folder of your course section that is not available to students you can try out a few different ways to deliver material. When it looks and works the way you want it to, you can simply copy that item, assignment, or exercise into one of the folders available to your students when you know it’s ready.

Final thoughts
In some ways the transition from the in-person modality to an online one is analogous to using a new textbook to teach a course you have experience in teaching. The goals are the same but some of the methods of getting there are different than what is familiar. There’s always a period of revision and refinement that get that course running to your expectations. In thinking about a course you are teaching online right now, what could that course look like and function 3 semesters from now?
This experience started in the second week of March when there were rumors that all classes would switch to the online modality. At that moment, I remember contacting Dr. Andrea Fabrizio and Mr. Carlos Guevara, English Department Chair and Director of the Educational Technology Department (EdTech), respectively, to let them know that I was willing to help colleagues to transition to the online environment. Dr. Fabrizio sent out an email thanking me and others and letting everyone in the English Department know that a group of faculty members had volunteered to assist them with the transition. Mr. Guevara thanked me for volunteering as well. Helping faculty members with this transition was a rewarding experience for me because for three months we prepared hundreds of instructors who are now teaching online either synchronously or asynchronously.

In June, Mr. Guevara emailed and offered me a part-time job as an Instructional Design Consultant (IDC) for EdTech, specifically with the Blackboard Online Learning Initiative (OLI) for the 2020 fall term. I accepted. As an IDC, I oversaw instructors’ work related to course design, form, and structure and a Mentor oversaw the pedagogical aspect of the course. At the onset of the course, things looked a little bit chaotic and to make matters worse, my Mentor quit after the first week. Nevertheless, Mr. Guevara took over as my group mentor and flexibility and availability included extended hour and sharing some screenshot tutorials that I developed to better illustrate specific solutions. June initiative ended and I was satisfied for having assisted our faculty members properly. Some of them showed their appreciation and acknowledged my work quality by sending emails to Dr. Fabrizio and Mr. Guevara. Probably their words influenced Mr. Guevara because I was rehired for the month of July, but with a new role.

In July, we began with a new OLI cohort, but my responsibility shifted to being a Mentor since there were no official IDCs for the course. Now, the emphasis was on the pedagogical aspect of the course. However, some instructors were new to this training and needed to learn about course design, form, and structure. Therefore, Mentors became IDCs who assisted professors in every possible aspect. That is why, I volunteered to work on weekends to accommodate some of them. I created more screenshot tutorials. Of course, I did not have all the answers, for this reason, I consulted with the EdTech staff for assistance and oftentimes came back with an answer. Once again, professors emailed Mr. Guevara to highlight my dedication, flexibility and patience while working with them and, again, I was rehired by EdTech for the August cohort as a Mentor. The August cohort ran more smoothly than the previous ones due to the earned experience. During this initiative, I was able not only to assist instructors, but to make some suggestions to EdTech to introduce some changes on the course delivery. My story ends with the most gratifying news because as of August 25th, I started working as a part-time Instructional Designer for EdTech, a contract that will end on June 30th, 2021. Summer 2020 brought me one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, not only because it brought me a new job, but because I was able to help my colleagues get ready for the 2020 fall semester while I learned a lot from each one of them and the EdTech team, my team. Finally, I would also like to thank professors Andrea Fabrizio, Deborah White, Elizabeth Olana, Robert Blair, Walter Rada, Remy Rousetzki, Ray Healey, Carlos Guevara, and many others for their encouraging words. They mean a lot and motivate me to keep on helping others acquire the necessary skills to continue teaching online whether it is in the synchronous or asynchronous modality. Thank you all so much!
Presenting in person is already a daunting task, presenting online presents a whole new set of challenges. With the correct methods and best practices, presenting online can be as effective or even more effective as presenting in person. Whether you are teaching a course or presenting a workshop, here are some best practices to keep in mind.

**Check, Double-check, Triple-check your Technology**
There is no faster way to lose your audience and potentially lose your credibility when your technology fails, whether the platform fails or is the result of user error. You should be comfortable with your video conferencing software and updates on your computer. At the end of the day, your computer is your responsibility. It is also a good idea to have a backup internet connection such as a mobile hotspot or have a backup co-presenter.

**Appearance is Key**
You should look to dress in a manner which does not distract or annoy viewers. A simple black shirt works well because it is a very clean look. Avoid wearing clothes with too many stripes, wild colors, or unusual designs as it will be distracting. When it comes to colors, red can bleed, white can make you appear too bright. The background is also important, if possible, a solid colored wall is preferred. If that is not possible, the background should be clean and neat. You can also utilize background changing tools that your video conferencing software provides.

**Maintain an Active Presence**
The best way to maintain an active presence is to turn on your webcam and frame yourself accordingly. You do not want to be too far or too close to your webcam. Preferably, you should frame yourself from chest level up, where your face and hand gestures are fully visible. Continue to use hand gestures for emphasis when explaining something. A good mental exercise is to imagine your audience in the same room as you and looking at your screen.

**Create an Active Audience**
Managing the audience is often the most challenging part of presenting online. It is easy for the audience to be distracted and trail off. You can also have the opposite issue when the audience is constantly interrupting with off topic questions. You should mute participants while pausing at intervals for questions. At the same time, plan intervals where you ask the audience for input. If the group is small, you can ask questions with an open microphone or if you have a larger group, utilize the poll features in your video conferencing platform.

Presenting online is not that different than presenting in person, in fact you will be utilizing most of the best practices in both cases. Even if you were presenting in person, you would still need to know your presentation platforms inside and out. Developing your online presentation skills will easily transfer back when you present in person again.
Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, educational technology departments across the world, including our own, have been required to switch our services online. Of course, in the beginning there was much difficulty for staff and faculty to adjust to the new normal and there are still hardships. Some faculty resonate with one-on-one support more than others, and remote work has definitely required staff to be extra attentive and diligent to get points and services across without diminishing quality. However, while not ideal in the beginning, this change has offered us a glimpse into different ways higher education institutions can continue to function and provide for staff and students.

Support through phone services has mostly been the same. If faculty or students need support, they can always reach us. One of the difficulties that arises is when faculty or students prefer physical support to guide them. A solution to this has been screen sharing via programs such as Blackboard Collaborate or WebEx in order to replicate the on-site support as much as possible. The more difficult challenges come from services such as workshops. Everyone learns at different speeds and different methods. To coordinate a workshop via multiple participants remotely can lead to confusion and offset the presenter’s direction of the workshop. Remedies to this have been to have assistants in the chat as well to address questions so the presenter can continue with the workshop. Another major issue is bringing faculty up to speed with Blackboard since

Many instructors haven’t used the LMS before. While guides and workshops are provided, a majority of the learning will have to come from the faculty. It is best to learn from experience rather than from theory. To provide students with the best possible education, there should be a system in place for an institution to provide a standard of how online course design should be built and assess that professors who built those courses are also well prepared in teaching them as well.

The quick change to remote learning can be considered “Emergency Remote Teaching” (Bond et al.). This may cause a decrease in quality of instruction and courses; however, in times of crisis the primary objective in the beginning is to “provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available” (Bond et al.). Over time the quality of the courses can be improved with experience from faculty going up and feedback from students. When it comes to designing the best possible online course, there are many modalities to consider, such as pacing, instructor role online, student role online, source of feedback, pedagogy, student-instructor ratio, etc. It is best to consider what the learners require most when building this course (Bond et al.).

No one expected education would become the way it was months ago. However, this is also an opportunity for higher education to explore online learning in more ways than ever before. Forced to adapt, online learning will now be a new normal. With this in mind, we can all work diligently on creating what is best for our faculty and students in digitalized education.

Citations
Asynchronous and Synchronous Teaching Engagement through Online Teaching: Asynchronous and Synchronous
Wednesday October 28, 2020
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Simply put Asynchronous/Synchronous are defined below:
Asynchronous: Asynchronous class meetings do not require you to log in to your virtual classroom at a specified time. Students do not have to follow a strict schedule to engage in live classes or discussions, and the only requirement regarding when they turn in their work is the assignment deadline, not an arbitrary timeline. Synchronous: Synchronous classes meetings resemble traditional on-campus In-Person classes in that students must be (virtually) present at the same time. Though they are conducted virtually, synchronous classes meet in real-time. Students must commit to scheduled class times and sign onto their virtual learning platform on schedule.

Focus On Technology Blackboard Creating SafeAssign and Turnitin Assignments
Monday November 9, 2020
3:30 PM - 4:15 PM
Focus On Technology workshops cover a variety of topics and they are focused on solving faculty issues in the classrooms. How to use a specific technology from the technical point of view is not discussed on these conversations. However, after the discussions take place, faculty can make an appointment or stop by the C-556 and speak more deeply with one of the specialist on how to implement certain technology to help them solve a particular issue.

Blackboard Grade Center Grade Center Advanced
Wednesday November 18, 2020
3:00 PM - Friday September 18, 2020 at 3:30 PM
Room C-559
Learn how to configure and connect your grade center with assignments, discussion board, and exams.

Lecture Capture Advanced
Wednesday December 2, 2020
3:30 PM - 4:00 PM
In this workshop we will cover basic editing, adding closed captioning to your recordings and creating quizzes.

EdTech is pleased to present the workshop calendar for the Fall 2020 semester. This semester includes workshops that focus on the requirements of teaching in a fully online environment. To register, go to: https://edtech.hostos.cuny.edu/Workshops
Online Learning Initiative (OLI)  *Ongoing Self-Paced Course*

This fall semester, the Office of Educational Technology is offering a new self-paced Online Learning Initiative that is in place for faculty who did not participate in any of the previous ones or for those who are new to the college this semester.

The purpose of this training course is to provide fundamental understanding of teaching in the online modality. These concepts are essential for both synchronous and asynchronous teaching styles. Aspects of course development, design, and delivery are covered in a five unit structure that follows best standards and practices available to date. This course also provides a firm and clear understanding of the components evaluated by the ETLC for course evaluation and certification.

Although this course is self-paced it is supported directly by the Office of Educational Technology. A list of staff is provided for contact, and participants can reach out for support at EdTechSupport@hostos.cuny.edu or 719-319-7915, as well as one-on-one consultations via Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate.

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**Online Training Workshops**

These workshops are available continuously online in Blackboard. Participants can register for the workshops by simply clicking the links in the workshop modules in their Blackboard Home Tab.

*For Students:*

- **“Are You Ready?”**
  Online Preparedness Course
- **ePortfolio Course**
- **Microsoft Office Training**

*For Faculty:*

- **Roadmap to Teaching Innovation**
- **OLI Ongoing Self-Paced Course**
- **Smart Classroom Certification**
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http://www.hostos.cuny.edu/edtech/etlc
Do you want to learn more about teaching online?

**GAIN TECHNICAL EXPERTISE**
Take The Roadmap for Teaching Innovation Blackboard Course

**REFINE YOUR COURSE DESIGN**
- Review the Online Course Development Guidelines
- Participate in the Online Learning Initiative Training program
- Gain course approval on the Online Course Evaluation System

**IMPROVE YOUR DELIVERY**
Review of articles and guides on Best Practices for Online Delivery

For more information go to:
https://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/online/
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Today's classroom extends beyond the classroom walls. Check out Panopto Lecture Capture, your single, easy-to-use classroom capture solution fully integrated with Blackboard. Whether you're flipping your courses, creating videos to help your students understand specific concepts or recording lectures for exam review.

Our lecture capture service offers you a suite of tools that make it easy for you to produce video content for your students to access via Bb. This includes audio recordings of your lectures along with anything you present on screen. You can even have a video of you speaking if you like, which allows students to review lectures anywhere with an internet connection on any computer.

How do I get started:
Review our Panopto site: http://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/panopto/
If you have questions and/or need help, contact EdTech

Hostos Community College  edTech  CUNY THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK