



Still Essential Life and work during the pandemic

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What has been the single greatest challenge you have faced as an educator during the COVID-19 pandemic?

It's been to suddenly and unexpectedly have to transition from face-to-face to online teaching, especially to mature non-native students who are even more technologically challenged than I am. We both have to struggle with learning and using the online platform. I had been putting off Canvas training for too long and being suddenly thrown into it at an intensive pace can be intimidating, frustrating, and stressful. In addition, teaching synchronously through Zoom has been quite challenging when some of my students are often interrupted by their young children, who are also confined to their dwellings.

What is something valuable that you have learned from your experience working during the pandemic?

While I normally enjoy the dynamics of being in the classroom with my students and providing individualized attention to them during breaks or office hours. It is possible to provide quality instruction through the online platform if the course is designed with care and is centered on students' learning. To make that happen, the online class cannot be over-capped just because there are no physical walls around us. Online teaching—particularly asynchronously--can democratize education. It can enable full-time working adults to return to school for self-development or for career advancement and can reach people who live far from physical institutions. Also, using online open educational resources makes education more affordable.

If you were to offer one piece of advice, wisdom or comfort to someone working as a community college faculty member during the COVID-19 pandemic, what would that be?

Having been thrust into this unforeseeable situation, all we can do is to focus on the fact that we have been given the opportunity to acquire a new set of skills that are useful for us to navigate this fast-evolving world that is powered by the rapid advance of technology. Embracing it and moving with it is much less tiring than resisting it. After all, as the moral in an Aesop fable taught, the wind can break a mighty oak tree, but not a small and feeble reed.

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To share your experiences of working through the COVID-19 pandemic, contact Deborah Kaye at debkaye@aft1521.org or Evan Henerson at evan@sendersgroup.com.