Transcript for Teaching Talk #1: Moving Online - What our students are saying

Dale: Good morning and welcome everyone. My name is Dale Lackeyram from the Office of Teaching and Learning and welcome to the Office of Teaching and Learning Teaching Talks.

I wanted to start things off by firstly beginning with a bit of acknowledging that we are in different spaces and places at this point in time, and that we are in areas that are governed by different types of treaties and relationships to the land and the environment that we are in. In particular now, The Dish with One Spoon covenant and our collective responsibilities to each other and the land, really reminds us of how we choose to exist in these places and spaces that we work and live in. As we explore some of our teaching successes and challenges during our responses to COVID-19 at the university, I have the pleasure of introducing two colleagues; Doctors Jason Mcalister and John Dawson from the College of Biological Sciences, who will be sharing some of their information on what students are telling us. Before we get started with John and Jason's presentation, I'll just do a little bit of what you can expect structurally during the webinar today. John and Jason will be chatting with us for about 15 to 20 minutes or so. During that period of time, this webinar will be recorded and the video link will be made available to you via a secure channel and I will also pass it over to the other face on the screen. So I'll get Jason and John you can see that names there but the other person on the call with us or the other two people are Dr. Aron Fazekas and Shehroze Saharan both from the Office of Teaching and Learning. Shehroze is just going to explain a little bit about the platform and how we're choosing to interact with you today on this webinar and then we'll pass it over to John for about 20 minutes of presenting and we have lots of time set up for Q&A at the end. Take it away Shehroze.

Shehroze Saharan: Hello everyone. Like Dale said, my name is Shehroze Saharan and welcome to our very first Teaching Talks. So a couple things for all the attendees you guys to remember, is if you look at the bottom right of your screen there should be a chat section. In there we posted a little FYI for everyone. So as you come in, you will notice that your microphones and videos will be turned off and they will remain off for the duration of the webinar. So how you guys will be asking questions during the Q&A section is at the very bottom of your screen in the ribbon you should see a Q&A box. When you click that you guys will be able to type your questions and then as questions come in, Dale and Aron will be asking those questions to the panelists and they will answer those. The questions will also be put on the chat box and that is it for me and I'll pass it off to Dr. Dawson.

John Dawson: Well great great. So what I'm gonna do now everyone is I'm gonna share my screen and share a PowerPoint presentation with you. You should be able to see that on your screen about now and then you'll see my video and when we switch over Jason will also have his video going on. I've got the little red laser pointer going on there just to help me as I go through.

John Dawson: So welcome today everyone and what we're going to talk about today is a survey that we did with our students and that I'll talk a little bit about that survey and the big messages from today's webinar are to tell you about the pros and cons of teaching online that our students were telling us. And this was really important. This is the student perspective in the moment. This was during the COVID emergency teaching time and this is what they were telling us at that time so it was a very raw, very real response from our students. And there were a few messages that you're going to hear about and we will reinforce and one is that connecting with our students and building community with our students during the COVID time especially but also for remote teaching in general is really important. We really have to reconsider what that looks like and then the importance of routine for students when we are teaching remotely. It is highlighted that routine then leads to self discipline for our students and that's what helps them be successful. So those are some of the major takeaways.

Let me tell you briefly about the survey that we sent out. What we did was we sent out a survey to our students to ask them about these various teaching elements and this is from an infographic that the COESP sent out on March 25th, and you can see it deals with different aspects of remote teaching.

How do you deliver your course? Do you do that synchronously or asynchronously? What about labs? How do those work? Then it had questions around the activities that students were experiencing. Were they using maybe classroom response systems or was there group work? And then there was questions around assessments and then questions around office hours, and finally we also asked our students about their mental health at that time.

What are you experiencing?
How's it going?
What are you worried about?
And importantly we asked them, is there any way we can help you?
What are your ideas during this emergency remote teaching time?

And we got some really good answers there. So we put together a survey that asked not only what are you experiencing but what do you think? How is it going? And we sent out, as you've seen down here, sent that out to 6500 unique emails of students who are taking CBS courses that were either first-year all the way to fourth year.

John Dawson: So these are individual people, individual students, we sent those out on April 8th and 9th. I can now tell you that it takes about 20 minutes for Outlook to work with the mail merge on Word to send out about 3000 emails at 11 o'clock at night and then we got 675 responses that we analyzed on April 11th, so very soon after. We're actually sitting at 885 responses currently, but we analyzed the 675. Which courses did we look at? This is just sort of housekeeping for you. These are all of the courses that we looked at. They were some of them were really huge courses, like the first year biology courses, all the way down to some smaller fourth year courses. We also included some of the courses that involve Guelph-Humber students as well.

In total again, 6500 students and if you can see, there's a point at the bottom, and that the responses that we receive, we didn't sort them by size, we didn't by class, pardon me. We weren't really as concerned about how many students answered, who were in first year versus fourth year. We were more interested in their individual experience. Also of note and Jason might touch on this, is that while these students were registered in these courses, they were taking all sorts of courses including some of the you know chemistry and physics and arts courses, history courses. So we learned a lot about all the different courses that our students were taking and we got some really rich data there. And I think with that, I'm gonna turn it over to Jason to tell us about the analysis. Jason.

Jason Mcalister: Great! Okay well thanks so much John. So as you heard from John, we had a lot of responses and each one of these surveys had tens and tens of comments so we ended up with thousands of comments from students, as you can imagine a lot of data to analyze. Now with this survey, we had both quantitative as well as qualitative data and we were really most interested right now in the qualitative side.

The quantitative data tells us what happened, but the qualitative data really tells us what our students were thinking and feeling about it and that's what we wanted to focus on. So as a first start we use the NVivo program, software program, and we coded responses within NVivo and now allowed us to at least get a handle on what our students were saying from a broad perspective. And with this coding, we still ended up as you can imagine with many many codes of data and we could draw out quotes but again we could send people pages of quotes but how do we let people really look at this data and really take something from it. And so, as our way of listening to what our students were saying, we wanted to bring this together into some infographics. So on the next slide here you'll see, you know go to the next slide there John.

Jason Mcalister: Alright so we wanted to take all of this information we had and what our students were telling us and make some infographics that that we could get out to people. Get something in someone's hands so if they're planning to take their course online in either the summer or potentially the fall, they have a pathway that they can follow.

So our first thing we did on the left-hand side there is develop a pathway and we'll look into this more on the next slide and talk about each step and then we also looked at we're gonna start to break out each individual component of that and do a more infographics like we see on the right, with looking at how do you actually teach livestream or putting in a content up on the CourseLink.

And again we'll talk about that in a broad overview in a couple slides. So if we go to the next slide here, we'll see here's our pathway and some of you may have seen this. We looked at what are our students saying, what do they want what helped them when their course moved online. And one of the first things we really heard from students was the communication piece. When we looked at the successes and challenges that were faced by our students, so often it came back to communication.

> Did they have weekly goals set for them?
> Were they able to have a transparent look at what was gonna occur as their course moved online?

And of course with this too, we're also looking at someone planning for a remote learning opportunity in this summer or fall so one of the first things we would encourage everyone to do is be very transparent with your students. That goes to routine as well, so routine really is something that follows throughout this whole pathway and we heard from our students that they really miss face-to-face courses and one of the things they miss is routine. They miss going to class. They miss connecting with their instructor.

And so a few things you can do for a routine is put up your your posts at this at a similar time every week at class time or some week you choose with your students, so they have that routine. Similarly with communication with routine, communicate at a similar time to your students every week so they know when they're expecting a message from you. With connection, we really heard from our students that they want to see you you as the instructor on the screen in some way. So whether that's synchronous, whether that's asynchronous, some way that you have a chance to connect with your students and we really see that this was a large part of student motivation as well, so that they remain engaged in the course in a remote setting.

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Jason Mcalister: For actually how do you choose to teach whether this is synchronous or asynchronous, we heard a lot about this from our students and we'll look at this a bit more on the next slide. Office hours, this again comes down to a lot of the chance to connect with your students. You can of course do office hours in a variety of ways, whether that is live or whether that is within the chat function. But really make this time available to your students, both office hours, so they can ask you specific questions but also for some of that informal communication which might have occurred in a face-to-face setting either prior to or just after the lesson has ended. There is that chance to just say hi or ask a quick question. Give your students the opportunity to have that similar environment in a remote teaching.

The final two here are assessment and feedback. So assessment, really think about frequent low stakes assessments. Let this be an opportunity for both you to receive feedback from your students, allow them to receive feedback on their own learning. This also comes back to routine as well. Students want a way to to check in on the course, to have something that they are accountable for week-to-week, so that they remain engaged. And finally feedback. As many of you know, ask your students what they think. You may be surprised on what they say that things may be working for them. And of course always respond to that feedback, being very transparent, letting them know what things you perhaps are able to change based on their feedback and what things perhaps you're not able to change but explain to them why it is the way it is. So with this we're going to look at the next slide which will look a little bit about the ways you can teach. So on the top here, we have live streaming. On the bottom is content that you post to CourseLink. And on the right in the light blue is advantages and in the pale pink on the on the right is things to be aware of. So less than perhaps pros and cons but more advantages and just things to be aware of. And there's quite a few things here and you can look at this yourself but I'll just highlight a few major topics. And we see again that within live streaming, you have the opportunity to have that connection which students really enjoyed in the live stream and they commented that they did feel motivated to attend class and that they also felt very comfortable asking questions and perhaps using a chat function to do that.

Things to be aware of there is accessibility, so whether that is issues with Wi-Fi, whether that is students who may or may not have a quiet place to attend a lesson wherever they may be living at the time. Accessibility is certainly something to consider. And also if you are using a chat function as the instructor, needing support in place to monitor that that chat, so you're not trying to monitor chat while you're teaching. On the bottom there, for content that you post so this just could be videos perhaps that you post of your lessons to CourseLink.

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Jason Mcalister: One thing we heard over and over from our students was that they enjoy being able to rewind and re-listen to that content and for this question, it was actually the most coded response we had from our students. But one thing they also really said about this is they recommended putting it up on YouTube because then it's much easier to rewind ten seconds at a time rather than having to start a whole slide over and start audio over again. So that's something for content when you post videos to really think about is the YouTube which can of course be done in a private matter. One other option or advantage for YouTube is we see there on the be aware side is downloading large files, again an issue of accessibility. Some of these files for video with audio can become very large and students have to download those to watch those so YouTube allows a way for them to watch those in a much easier way.

So with this again you can look at this more and if you want to ask us anything else we'll be happy to address those questions with you at the end. And with that, I think we'll go back to John, is that right?

John Dawson: Yep, yeah that's me here. Hi. Sorry I just you know trying to be AV boy while I'm doing this. The last last little bit of our presentation today we just wanted to talk about what our students were saying about their mental health during this time.

Remember this survey was given at April 8th, 9th and this date was April 11th. So this is around the time that classes were ending and exams, if they were gonna have anywhere on the horizon. So here we asked them about their mental health. You can see the results of that question, how is your mental health now compared to before. And of course I guess this isn't a surprise. Many of them, the majority of them were on the this is worse side. Some were much better which was interesting and we got some interesting stories about that, but they were on the smaller number of students. We asked them what they were worried about and then how we can help. So when we asked them what they were worried about, there were some major themes that came through with that. Well let me get PowerPoint working. And here's the word cloud from all of that.

The major themes were they were worried about exams because it makes sense exams were the next thing that was happening. Beyond exams, they were worried about their family. I think we're all we're worried about our family and where we were at. They were worried about how things were gonna go at home. They were worried about what their schooling. They were worried about how work was gonna work was going to happen. And this word working could kind of apply to many things.

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John Dawson: How's exams gonna work? How am I gonna work? So there were many of these themes that came out of that. I just wanted to highlight some of the comments that the students gave us. So I'm gonna give you three quotes about exams and then two quotes about family because these were the big issues.

So the top three about exams. And the first student quote says that they were concerned they were,

> "Dealing with and taking care of my family...", so it deals with family, "... while also handing every assignment and studying for exams".

So they were just overwhelmed with all of this stuff. The second one here we heard a lot about students concerned with the grades. It said,

> "The fact...", the fact without even knowing, "The fact that my exams are going to drop my grades and I will no longer get scholarships I rely on for paying for my schooling".

So students were really worried. And then finally the technical aspect we heard a lot about the word respondus, which is the lockdown browser and respondus software,

> "Completing an exam via respondus without my laptop breaking down, my internet cutting out, or being accused of academic dishonesty".

A lot of students had never used lockdown browser respondus before. 80% of my Intro Biochem course said I've never used this before. So asking them to do it at that time you know was causing a lot of anxiety. About family, we saw a lot of responses about family and I just wanted to highlight two of them.

One of those was when folks were in a difficult family situation. And here is one response here the fourth one that says,

"This is very hard for me because I live with a larger family, with 4 other siblings".

One of my own students they had to leave the house and go live with a family friend to be able to get internet access and complete the course. That's how big their family was.

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John Dawson: And then finally on the positive side, these students were very anxious. And here's one that said,

"I feel safe at home and supported by my family when I'm studying".

So we get to see a lot of what was going on with our students as people during this time as well.

The last thing to share with you was our question. We asked the students what can we do to help you and they gave us a lot of really good ideas and I want to share those with you. And they were saying things like maybe provide access to video calls with online counselors or stress relief tips for being at home. Maybe an online chat with a therapist, you know, instead of a phone call or email. Providing opportunities for students to help each other. Peer to peer, opening a discussion board in your in your courses for example. And then this last one was kind of fun. Having someone send an email asking how things are going, kind of like a COVID pen-pal kind of idea. I also wanted to highlight one student comment that I thought was really brilliant, really highlighted. And that's the one on the bottom that said to help support their mental health they were saying have a universal class delivery system work assignments, quizzes and class livestreams.

Our students were really struggling with all of the different things that were happening at once and we've seen the more successful universities and I think Guelph did really well, but universities that have been most successful were the ones that early on said there's this we're gonna keep it simple we're gonna have one way of doing this this and this and their students then were on board with that. So that was our presentation and about what we learned from our survey and here are some take-home messages from that.

Our students gave us a lot of feedback about these three things;

1. How to motivate them
2. The importance of feedback be that live from assessments and so on;
3. And the critical point about accessibility.

And we're not alone on this, I was on a webinar, an international webinar, and folks from India were saying the same thing, folks from Ghana were saying the same thing, our students don't have access to internet and it's difficult to maintain university courses.

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John Dawson: I also wanted to highlight a major thing here at the bottom that making connections and building community is just as important as the content.

Now I know that might shock some of you and it's little heretical but with remote teaching it's so important that the students are able to connect with you, they're able to build community within your course and that's what will support their learning.

Here's two quotes to end us off.

> "I think the greatest thing that has helped me is complete honesty and transparency from a professor".

And secondly,

> "Keep communicating with the students, this makes me feel like I'm part of the UoG community".

And with that I want to thank you for coming today and we're happy to take your questions I'm going to turn that over to Dale. Thank you.

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