

# Transforming the Classroom in Response to the Covid-19 Emergency

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## Introduction:

- **March 12, 2020, Farmingdale State College shut down all face-to-face classes. Faculty members were asked to transition their courses to an online or remote environment.**
- **Faculty were unable to return to campus for the rest of the spring semester.**
- **Faculty had two weeks in which to transition their courses to 100% distance/remote/online delivery**

## School of Business Initial challenge

- Moving 6 departments, over 165 full & part-time faculty, over 486 course sections to a distance mode of instruction
- Majority of sections were converted into what has become known as “Remote Synchronous” courses.
- Course delivery varied tremendously by instructor.
- Most instructor met online during the regularly scheduled course time using one of the 3 college licensed tools – Blackboard Collaborate, Google Meeting, or Microsoft Teams (other platforms that were used as well included Zoom, Webex, YouTube, Textbook Publishers websites/systems, etc.)
- Some faculty plans (a very small number) were as simple as conducting class almost exclusively by email, with the instructor sending assignments & written class lectures, with students submitting these assignments by email.

## Issues and Problems:

- Student technology & internet/broadband access at home
- Flexibility on the part of both instructors & students on the use of various technologies, testing & proctoring, assignment submissions, etc.
- College developed a Pass-Fail option (not available on all courses, spring semester only) which provided students with some flexibility & safety net
- Communications issues between students & instructors especially around assignment & exam deadlines.
- Training of faculty on the use of the LMS – both DL & IT ramped up quickly to offer instruction & support in the use of the various tools available for instructional use.

## Farmingdale was not alone:

- AACSB Survey (330 Business schools reporting) – 94 % had moved at least 75% of their courses online
- Bloomberg Businessweek March 19, 2020 headline reported, “Coronavirus forces \$600 Billion Higher Education Industry Online.”

## Outcomes & Lessons learned

- Faculty/student communications key to making distance learning work – majority of complaints that filtered into the Dean’s office were directly related to this one factor
- Need for flexibility in responding to varying technology problems that both students & faculty encountered
- Experience of Spring semester led the College to adopt the requirement that all instructors utilize the LMS (Blackboard) for their fall courses regardless of teaching modality
- The College created 6 potential teaching modalities for the 2020-2021 academic year: Online (100% asynchronous), Remote Synchronous (meets virtually at regularly scheduled time), Remote B (50% asynchronous, 50% synchronous), Live-Stream (from the classroom), Hybrid/Flex (primarily for lab type courses), Large remote learning classes with smaller in-person on-campus recitation meetings.
- All faculty are required to undertake base level of training with the use of the LMS. Depending on the teaching modality adopted, faculty may need to additional training modules
- Greater acceptance of online & distance formats for instruction by faculty members
- Indications of some dissatisfaction by students in the spring semester.
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (2020), reported that 60 % of faculty respondents (935 total) found that their online courses were worse than their traditional classroom instruction
- AACSB. 2020. “B-Schools Together in the Pandemic – Differently.” Found at <https://aacs.edu/blog/2020/april/b-schools-in-the-pandemic-differently>.
- Chronicle of Higher Education. 2020. “Did the Scramble to Remote Learning Work?” The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac 2020-21 (August 21, 2020), p. 5.
- <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-19/colleges-are-going-online-because-of-the-coronavirus>

## Case Study: The History, Politics, and Geography Department and the Challenges of the Coronavirus Pandemic, March 2020.

- The Covid-19 Emergency that arrived in New York in March 2020 confronted academic institutions and department chairs with an emergency situation. The shutdown of the Farmingdale campus, and the transition to an all-online format, began on 11 March 2020. Our department (and the campus as a whole) immediately responded in three phases: The approach taken at Farmingdale State College corresponds to the responses campuses adopted as a whole.
- In **Phase One**, all courses that met in person, both the traditional face-to-face and hybrid courses had to now be converted to an all-online delivery. In our department, 102 sections needed to be adjusted and 54 faculty needed some form of basic online training. For the spring semester at least, colleges had to adopt a series of stop-gap measures to ensure remote course delivery, while also guaranteeing students could successfully complete the semester, (Burke, March 9, 2020). Bloomberg News observed that “70% of America’s 1.5 million faculty members” had never taught classes online before Covid-19. (Ismail/CMSWIRE.COM).
- **Phase Two:** Once the Governor ordered the SUNY system to transition to all remote learning, IT immediately held training sessions in Blackboard, our on-campus online platform, to train as many faculty as possible with a basic knowledge of the system for posting course information and communication with students. On campuses across the United States, Distance Learning offices depended heavily on campus IT departments to adopt course delivery software and, in some cases, “purchased packaged software platforms” to facilitate instruction. (Ismail/CMSWIRE.COM). Fortunately, the following week (16 – 22 March) was spring break, affording more time to prepare the transition.
- **Phase Three:** Farmingdale, like all campuses, had to insure that students had the technological capabilities to adopt to the new remote environment (Nelley, 2020). Farmingdale State College distributed both Chromebooks and Laptops (MACS and PCs) as a resource for those students needing technology. As of this fall, the college distributed 152 Laptops and 56 Chromebooks to students. The college also implemented the VDL, “Virtual Desktop Infrastructure.” This allowed students to access programs and software remotely through a virtual environment. Farmingdale State College added more hot-spots for wireless access both indoors and outdoors across campus. For example, the campus added “Outdoor Green Zones” which included wireless internet access in the parking lots and open plazas surrounding campus. Farmingdale College also added “Indoor Green Zones” which included wireless internet access in most indoor areas where access was not already available such as the lecture halls, student lounges, and dorm areas.
- The transition to remote instruction required much more work from both students and faculty. Sometimes, learning all of the different delivery platforms (Zoom, Blackboard, GoogleMeets, GoogleClassroom) intimidated and frightened both students and faculty. Both faculty and students were thrust into “uncharted territory” in a very short space of time (Ebrahimij, 3/24/2020). For this fall semester, Farmingdale required all faculty and students to use one form of remote delivery platform (Blackboard Learn) to minimize stress and uncertainty. One central platform is now used for communication between faculty and students in order to insure the success of students and faculty alike.
- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/16/us/online-school-coronavirus-trnd/index.html>
- <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/how-to-overcome-challenges-of-online-classes-due-to-coronavirus>
- <https://www.cmswire.com/digital-experience/how-universities-are-handling-the-shift-to-distance-learning/>
- <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/03/09/colleges-move-classes-online-coronavirus-infects-more>

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