

ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN TIMES OF A PANDEMIC: SEVERAL DISTANCE EDUCATION IDEAS FOR PURSUING THE SEMESTER

PREAMBLE

The current situation we are experiencing is novel and uncertain, pushing our entire community – students, professors, administrative staff, professionals and support staff – to examine distance education as a means of pursuing classes. The CCSI Ouest, in collaboration with the CRISPESH and the adaptive services department of Cégep du Vieux Montréal, have created a tool for professors with the intention of offering them potential solutions to complete the current semester. That being said, our objective is still for students to acquire the knowledge and competencies specific to each class. Our students will have access to diversified means and learning conditions, well representative of the diversity of each class, and this situation has the potential to induce anxiety in anyone. The following table offers ideas to professors with the goal of helping them to adapt their teaching methods to the exceptional conditions and the unique challenges that we are currently experiencing. An approach that is reassuring, benevolent and comprehensive will obviously be at the heart of the deployed pedagogy.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS TO KEEP IN MIND...

- **Flexibility:** Anticipate that the situation will bring several challenges to students (stress, limited resources, parents with children at home, loss of income, etc.). Provide options when needed, allowing a certain flexibility for the pursuit of their studies.
- **Accessibility to the course and content:** Certain students do not have the electronic material or the software necessary to complete all assignments and may need to find a computer or an alternative to grant them autonomy. Consequentially, we must think of solutions to facilitate access for students to course content (bandwidth capacity, recordings for offline listening, etc.).

Moreover, the formats used to pursue classes (videoconference, documents with voiceover, PDF, etc.) may need to be adapted according to the needs of the students. If necessary, please contact your adaptive services pedagogical counselor at the SAIDE, who is assigned to your program of study and who will help you if a problem arises with putting in place an accommodation.

- **The motivation and commitment** of students will be put to the test like never before in the current situation. These two crucial factors for learning decrease significantly with time in a distance education context; it is therefore essential to take into account the affective and motivational dimensions of our education.

PREPARATION

Flexibility:

- Revise the course syllabus and the evaluation criteria given the current distance education situation;

Accessibility:

- Provide documents in a format that is easily accessible to all remotely (Word, PowerPoint, PDF, Open source, etc.) in order to enable the use of screen reading software and annotating by students (active reading, taking notes, etc.);
- Centralize all resources as much as possible (documents, collaborative work and communication tools for group work, etc.) on the same platform (Lea, Teams, etc.);
- Plan a recording of synchronous activities in order to allow an asynchronous consultation of the material, as needed;

Motivation and commitment:

- If necessary, target what aspect of a course can be gamified and use available applications if relevant;
- Adapt the student workload to the current context;
- Accompany the student in their reading by the preparation of reading keys, partial notes, network of concepts to be completed, etc.

COURSE DELIVERY

Flexibility:

- Consider a synchronous and an asynchronous method that allows the majority of students to have access to the material (platform that is easily accessible on mobile devices if necessary);
- Ask for feedback from students in order to make adjustments to delivery;

Accessibility:

- Make various supporting documents (PowerPoint, lesson plans, etc.) available online in advance;
- When possible, record the course deliveries and make them available for subsequent asynchronous viewing;
- Share PowerPoint presentations with voiceover, giving access to explanations as in class;

Motivation and commitment:

- Share course notes and create a collaborative group for sharing course notes between students;
- Frequently offer shortened versions of documents and wrap-ups, as well as provide summary documents;
- Establish clear course guidelines (netiquette) when it comes to class participation and make your expectations clear;
- Shorten synchronous classes in order to maximize the concentration and hold the attention of students.

SUPPORT

Flexibility:

- Offer various options for individual communication with students: MIO, email, videoconference, frequently asked questions forum, phone, etc.;
- Maximize opportunities for peer support (class forums, group study sessions by videoconference, etc.);
- Share the answers to certain past assignments when possible;

Accessibility:

- Consult the students on what their support needs are and keep in mind the confidentiality of individual and group exchanges;
- Note the recurring individual questions in order to share them with everyone or to create a FAQ for the group and encourage students to ask their questions directly in this FAQ;

Motivation and commitment:

- Communicate earlier and more often with students in order to reassure them and support them for the duration of the course;
- Suggest the use of planning tools to promote good time management and lessen student stress;
- Set the expectations of students regarding your response time;
- Set "office" hours in order to provide quick feedback.

EVALUATION

Flexibility:

- Be more flexible: some students might have to benefit from temporary or permanent delays or incompletes due to their personal situation;
- Re-evaluate the weighting of your evaluations: for example, withdraw an evaluation method such as a final exam in favor of a practical one/applied work, or distribute the weighting over several assessments rather than just one;
- When possible, offer students the choice between two or more assessment methods (e.g. written or oral, etc.);
- Use tools to create assessments with integrated answer keys;

Motivation and commitment:

- Favor reflexive or creative assessments which allow the use of course notes and other various tools available to students;
- Offer students several ways to monitor their progress (detailed deadlines, evaluation grids, checklists, etc.).