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**In support of suspending student evaluations for Spring, Summer and Fall 2021**

In our Health and Safety proposal, we're requesting a full suspension of student evaluations and classroom observations until Phase 4 of the Governor's re-opening plan is complete.

In support of our proposal, I bring you words of direct experience by our DGCE who grapple every day with the hardships of teaching online or hybrid to share their experiences anonymously.  I will also make some overarching statements based on common knowledge as well as recent materials published in the Chronicle of Higher Ed, and in some limited cases on my own experience as a faculty member.

I promise to be quick.  Please resist the temptation – as our students do – to reach for your devices or open a separate window in your browser.

I am not being flippant nor patronizing you.  A vast majority of our students deal with **anxiety** and depression, so, as a coping mechanism, they withdraw into social media and texting, gaming, binging shows, even doing other homework in our classes.  Pandemic-related anxiety and depression have spiked because of unemployment, loss of independence, stress, isolation, fear of getting sick.  Even while living on campus, where testing and other precautions exist, students feel low, edgy and overall frustrated.  In addition to all that, our non-traditional students are overwhelmed by their children learning remotely at home and by their aging relatives needing additional care.

Pre-pandemic campus life fostered human and academic connection in the spirit of growth for the individual student and the community.  In my business of foreign language methodology, motivation and socialization are key components for successful learning.  If a student is motivated to learn beyond

grades, and socializes successfully in the classroom environment and beyond, they will thrive because they will form a connection with the study materials, the professor and their fellow students.  No matter how hard we try and how much cutting-edge technology we invoke, it has proven very difficult for both students and faculty to shift that stimulating **connection** online. In our survey a colleague wrote, quote: "It is very difficult to teach courses via zoom and make real connections with our students. We can't interact as well. I usually walk around the classroom or go to a student's desk to help […]. I can't use a board or present PowerPoints in meaningful ways."  Another wrote, quote: " […] the students [are] experiencing fatigue and distraction and dissatisfaction from the online learning environment. […] My students are not at their best because they didn't "sign up" for online learning either and haven't been adequately prepared to succeed," end quote.  Our students are feeling disconnected, exhausted, unhappy and unprepared for remote learning.  This is ~~are~~ causing **communication** challenges between students and their professors, leading to numerous emails daily and inability to form genuine connection with the students.  A DGCE Chair said, quote : " [w]hat [the faculty] think is funny, the students don't.  Students are anxious and continually tell me they want to be back in a classroom" end quote; body language is an important part of communication and is missing in online/remote learning, and this impacts connection and evaluation; another said, quote: "[s]ince the pandemic hit, students […] have been emailing me as individuals, asking the same questions over and over again (e.g. when [is homework] due? Do I get credit for completing the review questions?) […] They have also emailed me about their home and work and life situations, which include many troubles and tragedies. It's no surprise that many of them have been rendered much less functional over this awful period. I've done my best to respond sensitively to each email (I was getting at least 20 a week[…])" end quote.  I don't know you, but I empathize profoundly with this colleague as I have myself received similar emails from worried and anxious students – a symptom of a larger malaise.

Directly related to lack of connection is one element which transpired throughout the survey: lack of student **engagement**. I am sure you have experienced this yourselves as faculty or as administrators. A colleague says, quote: "[s]tudent engagement in the material and courses seemed to be at an all-time low. Several students didn't complete assignments and this resulted in failing grades. Others just didn't engage at all. […] [t]he stress and isolation of the pandemic resulted in even "good" students struggling to stay engaged, learning and on task," end quote. And another, quote: "Students need additional support beyond overworked faculty." As faculty, we are spending a lot of time and energy trying to explain to students how to navigate online learning while we're learning how to do that ourselves, sometimes with little or no support. I'll come back to this later, but for now look at how the lack of engagement becomes evident in how students manage their online presence. Many choose to never turn on their cameras, regardless of class policy. Others keep their online learning in the background of their main activity, like one would have a tv or a radio, as in this example, quote: "One student zoomed in on her phone […] and was driving around doing chores. She left the phone on while she ran into the store for something […] and her kids started fighting. I had to figure out how to mute her." This happened in the middle of a lecture, as this other, quote: "[one student zoomed] in from the stockroom at work. His boss came in and said he had to get back to work. The boss poked his head into the computer video and said, "Sorry I need him more than you need him," and the screen went dead. The same [student zoomed in from] his car for the next class meeting, and a nearby car alarm went off," end quote. Mind you, I bring you these examples not as a criticism of students; but because these situations are extreme and yet very real and sobering for all those of us who teach non-traditional students, who suffer from a different lack of engagement than traditional, college-age students: one that is borne out of familial duty and financial self-reliance and responsibility when one must combine work, family, and education at a time when schools are remote, work is scarce, and the federal stimulus package has yet to deliver.

On top of all that, learning in pandemic mode has also short-changed student **access** to hands-on practice and specialized equipment.  A colleague says, quote: "Due to restrictions in capacity, [...] I had to restrict the number of students attending in person to half the class, with the other half online watching on alternating class sessions. I made many educational videos for them to watch remotely. The students lost half the in-class time they would normally get with hands on tutoring to do the projects. The quality of their work was significantly lessened as a result [...] they were frustrated by the lack of class time when they could work with me there to help them. They were frustrated by having to [...] work alone when they would encounter obstacles they could not overcome [...]" end quote.  Of course, everyone is doing the best they can, but – think for a moment – all these pandemic-related elements I mentioned till now: students' anxiety and depression, lack of academic engagement, communication breakdowns, loss of access to equipment and faculty hands-on assistance… how would all that reflect in a student evaluation?  One colleague phrases this concern very well for all of us, quote: "I think evaluations might serve as an outlet for students to voice their frustrations with the university as a whole. Many students feel disconnected and unheard when it comes to their frustrations, and I think the faculty evaluations might suffer as they (meaning faculty) are the closest contact to the university."

One main source of frustration for both faculty and students is the online/remote learning **technology**.  I don't need to describe the acrobatics all faculty and schoolteachers across the country have done to move our instruction online because of pandemic and institutional imperatives. Consider though how last-minute software updates from Fall to Spring have affected faculty's work, quote: "I have been using VoiceThread to help present content in an asynchronous course. I found out right at the beginning of the semester that the program has been updated. As a result, the way that I incorporated VT into Blackboard is outdated, although it was based on a tutorial from the [Technology Center]. My students were prevented from accessing the material and I needed to go in to Blackboard, delete all my VT links, and import the VTs again a different way so that students had access. This delayed two of my courses

this semester" end quote.  And another, quote: "I have had multiple moments where Teams has done something weird during class such as […]the chat […] freezing and (me) not being able to access the chat until I signed out and then signed back in. It is completely unreliable, non-intuitive, clunky […]  Certainly, some of these things happen to all of us, including students. And while some students are able to cultivate patience, other students see this as lack of preparation, [lack of knowledge], and [lack of] ability," end quote.  And that is a huge concern for faculty everywhere: if something goes wrong with the technology in the middle of class, how will this reflect on my evaluation?  How do I control the quality of my internet connection at home, and how that will impact my live remote classes? Especially if I am a woman and/or a person of color, and/or a non-English speaker and/or a member of another marginalized group?  Studies have shown that student evaluations measure bias and prejudice much more effectively than teaching effectiveness.

Studies also show that, quote: "there is a strong positive correlation between students' expected grades in a college course and their evaluations of the instructor for that course" end quote.  Clearly student evaluations would convey overall distress and dissatisfaction with the learning circumstances, as I described earlier on today, in addition to the fear of failing the course or getting a grade lower than expected.

I could go on listing our complaints on workload increase and unpaid prep time – in some cases to see one's course cancelled just before it was supposed to begin – at a time when we are agreeing to a 0% stipend increase.  So in conclusion:

We understand that the universities are planning for a return to in-person teaching in the Fall of 2021, however that might or might not coincide with Phase 4, the so-called new normal.   We have worked together to ensure that the health of our campus communities is preserved.  At this time we ask that the integrity of the evaluation process is preserved by suspending student evaluations for the duration of

this one-year extension because, as I have shown in this presentation, multiple pandemic-related factors

in our students' academic lives would affect the quality of their evaluation of our work.

**References**

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