

Transcript

Stacey Johnson: [0:01] This is Leading Lines. I'm Stacey Johnson, one of the producers of the Leading Lines podcast. And I'm also the Assistant Director for Educational Technology at the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University. Like most other colleges in the country right now, Vanderbilt is moving to remote teaching and learning through the end of the spring 2020 semester. This unprecedented situation seemed like a good time to get some experts to weigh in on how faculty who maybe don't normally teach online, can use technology to teach from a distance. And also, what instructors should keep in mind as they conduct class over the next few weeks. Before we meet today's guests, I wanted to set the stage a little bit by introducing some of the terminology that I find very helpful in my conversations about this move to remote teaching. Just to get started, this is not online course design we're talking about. Online course design is a whole other iterative process that's based on professional standards and research and input from stakeholders. What we're talking about right now, is moving courses that were designed for a face-to-face setting online, using different kinds of technologies. I like to call this course translation. It's more a process of figuring out how can we bend the course management system to the plan we already have? And any place where there's not a clear match between the technology available to us and the plan, we have to make some tough choices about, is this actually an essential part of the plan, or can it go? And if it is essential, how are we going to bring in the tools that we need to enact it in our classroom?

[1:50] So some of the important things that I think we need to keep in mind, as we listen to our guests, and as we go into our own campuses and into our own classrooms and think about how are we going to translate our courses online. One thing I'd like to talk to people about is that there is a difference between presentational activities in class and interactional activities. So when I come into my face to face classroom, I don't necessarily draw hard lines between here's where I'm going to present to the class. Here's where I'm going to interact with the class. Here's when they're going to interact together. I sort of flow in and out of different kinds of activities. So I might come in and have a few minutes of just informal

conversation, with my students about how they reacted to the readings and how life is going and how it relates to the course. Then I might say, "okay, let's get started" and I'll maybe put up my lecture slides and do some presentation.

[2:50] But I don't just do 40 minutes of lecture slides, right? I stop and I say, "Ok, let's do a think-pair-share here." or, "let's have some structure discussion." Then maybe we'll go back to the slides and we sort of go in and out of these presentational activities, where I'm presenting to the class and the interactional activities that really requires us to do a back and forth. It's also possible, in some classrooms, that students are the ones doing the presentational activity. They've prepared something, they do it in front of the class. It's followed up with some interaction. So in a face-to-face class, this is just really organic. Presentation and interaction naturally blend together in a face-to-face classroom.

[3:37] But in an online setting, it's really useful to be able to tease those things out and do them separately using different tools. So that informal ten minutes of discussion at the top of my class, I can do that, but I need a tool that's specifically built to help us manage sort of informal reactions to the work and to set the stage for the rest of the class. That ten minutes of more structured lecture time where I'm presenting, I can do that, but I'm not going to use the same tool I used for the informal conversation. I'm going to use a tool that allows me to present effectively. And hopefully that tool is not going to require students to sit online in the same time, in the same place that I am and listen to my presentation. Because they could really listen to that presentation at any point.

[4:30] Which brings me to my next set of terminology, which is synchronous versus asynchronous. We have synchronous and asynchronous activities in a face-to-face classroom, for sure. Everything that happens when we're actually in the classroom, that's synchronous. But then what about the readings that students did before class? I gave them the readings probably weeks in advance. If students are writing papers, if they have projects, that's all happening asynchronously. One of the challenges for online teaching, and particularly online teaching, the way we're doing it right now, under the circumstances that we're in right now, is that we can't predict that students will have the ability or the technology to be able to meet every single time we schedule the meeting online. They're not on campus. They're going through a lot right now. There's a million obstacles that might keep a student from making it to a live presentation. And so thinking about which of these elements of my class are currently done synchronously because I am a face-to-face teacher, but would actually make sense or be possible to do asynchronously? So all the presentational elements that we talked

about earlier, my lecture, student presentations, all of that kind of stuff can easily be moved to asynchronous, which just gives our students more flexibility in how they interact with our course. For me, in a time like this, the more flexible we can be, the more choices that we can give our students, the better.

[6:13] And then the last question that I want to discuss is high bandwidth versus low bandwidth. So if you've teased out the presentational from the interactional and kind of thought about how can you use different tools to do those two things. And then you've thought through, "what activities from my face to face classroom actually could be asynchronous?" and put those into another category. Then what we're left with is interactional activities that are happening synchronously, right in our classroom. So it would be like facilitating class discussion, whether that be structured or informal. And that's where bandwidth comes in because live video interactions are great. There's a lot of really great tools like Skype and Zoom and tons of tools that can facilitate live video conferencing so you can replicate that synchronous interaction. However, they're all high bandwidth tools. Live video conferencing is like the highest bandwidth activity you can do in an online class, followed by other kinds of videos. Really, anytime you're using video, you're using a high bandwidth tool. What does that mean for your students who went back home mid-semester, and are in a house now where there isn't reliable internet or where there is reliable internet, but there's only one computer and they have to share it with every other member of the family? High bandwidth tools can be really useful, but if you're relying on them exclusively to communicate your course content, you could run into some problems with accessibility.

[7:55] So with those synchronous interactions, what are some ways that we can lower the bandwidth, occasionally use different tools? I'm actually a fan of video conferencing. I'm not trying to discourage anyone from using it. But how can we not put all of our eggs in that basket? If you're not gonna do live synchronous video interactions, maybe you could do live audio interactions. What about everyone using the video conferencing tool with the video turned off? That would lower the bandwidth requirements a lot. What about using a conference call? If what you're looking for is interaction, you also might think about making it an asynchronous interaction, using a text or an audio or a video discussion board. There's all sorts of ways to think about teaching remote. But for me, the distinctions between presentational, interactional, synchronous and asynchronous. And high versus low bandwidth really helped me to evaluate the activities that I'm picking for my course. And make sure that I have things that are going to meet the needs of all of my students.

[9:07] For this episode of Leading Lines, I wanted to talk to teaching experts, who are on the front lines of helping faculty at their institutions move their teaching online. So let's jump right in. Hi, Jennifer. I would love it if you could introduce yourself to the listeners and tell us how you're feeling about this big move to online teaching.

Jennifer Townes: [9:30] So I'm Dr. Jennifer Townes. I am the Associate Dean of Professional Development at Southwest Tennessee Community College. I'm not as nervous as I thought I was going to be. And one of the reasons why is because we have such, our president is really committed to having an emphasis on teaching and learning, which is why I'm in the position that I am in. And so one of the things that we started talking about very early on, as we were following the news and realizing that this is going to be something new and something different. And talking about what's currently in place. And the first thing that our digital learning team did was assess who is using the tools currently, who has content, who's using the learning management system outside of those who are teaching strictly online. And so there was a good number of people who are already using parts of the learning management system. So we started there. And then our team, instructional designers, kind of really kind of jump in there and help them identify the parts that can be taken out, that can be updated. While at the same time, our Digital Learning Team is going to be providing strictly tools training. This is how you use it, this is how you develop it. And so we, we developed that plan and we kind of just have started hitting the ground running. Our president led the charge by saying, "First, do no harm to students." And so as we do the work that we do, we are keeping our students at the center of that and making sure that the things that we do and we think about how that impacts our students. And for us, because we are in city of Memphis, and we have all of those barriers that come with poverty, like lack of access with tools because a lot of our students use phones as their technology. And so as we develop these, we move online, we have to keep that in mind. So we've tried to provide chrome books, but also that may not be enough. We recognize that even those who have access to technology, maybe sharing it in a household, especially with everyone being at home. Our K12 students are home now too. So we're trying to make sure that we keep our students at the center of what we do. We also recognize that we have faculty who may be very intimidated, maybe overwhelmed because some of them, have not used the tools and some of them have used it, but not comfortably and don't feel comfortable going online. And so we're trying to also make sure that faculty have a certain level of autonomy in this process. And we make sure that they understand and know that we're here to support them, whether it be just us doing it, we're, you know, a lot of times we really try to get them to do as much as possible, but we recognize that right now,

our goal is to get them in a place where they can teach. And if that means just taking everything and putting it in there for them and just showing them how to use a tool right now, that's fine. And so we have a plan. And that plan is student centric, but also in a way that really supports faculty. So I know that was a very long winded answer. And the short of it is, whatever we need to do to make sure that faculty feels supported and that we are focusing on students and doing no harm to them.

Stacey: [12:52] I have a question, I really like your turn of phrase. You said, "help faculty find a low-hanging fruit." I would love to hear, if you're in a conversation with a faculty member who does not feel comfortable moving online, what is the low-hanging fruit they can reach for? For those who are listening, who did not expect to be in this situation.

Jennifer: [13:12] We know the things that we all use. We use email. Those are the things that you already use. So how can we utilize that right now, until you feel more comfortable? How can we, how can we partner? Because one of the things that I'm not really surprised about, but wasn't really aware to the extent at which faculty really kind of team teach, really communicate. So then it's like, okay, so how can your other, your teammates support you? So I know in our natural sciences area, the people who are more well versed are taken on and mentoring and bringing someone along who, who are not as comfortable. Specifically, some of our adjuncts who don't always get connected to those training opportunities. And that's another thing, we're really trying to be intentional and staying available until 8:30 so that we can capture our adjuncts and make sure that they are also included in, in the training and have access to all of this. So some of those things are, you know, using email, you know, you can e-mail the assignments right now, if that's where you're comfortable, let's e-mail that to our students. How are your colleagues using technology? Can, can they give you some stuff? And so we have full time instructional designers. You can come to the lab and have your class in the lab, if you wanted, you know, do live meetings, you can come in the lab and we'll be here to set it up and help walk you through any technical issues. Our IT team is available, as well. So all of the resources we are going to be located at every location so that faculty feel supported all the way through.

Stacey: [15:00] I think that's just a really good point to make to someone who might be listening and isn't aware of what their institution has to offer, is at your institution probably is mobilizing all of these kinds of resources. And so figuring out how to connect to them, instead of trying to figure it all out on your own.

Jennifer: [15:17] A lot of institutions are putting out that information. Here are our resources. Here's a link. Go here. Do this. So I'm seeing the plans. I'm seeing them posted. I'm seeing that there's a lot of communications, there's a lot of support system popping up on social media. Facebook, I shared one with you. And just a lot of different social platforms where we can go get information and get supported. And not just us, but faculty. They are faculty facing and they are there supporting each other. So those are also wonderful ways in which you can get supported outside of your institution.

Stacey: [15:57] So, I've already heard you say, use the tools you know, even if that's e-mail, connect with faculty, share resources, rely on institutional resources like the Zoom rooms that you have set up on campus. If I'm the faculty member who's struggling to imagine my course online, what are some of the things you would ask me to do and have that conversation with me, I guess?

Jennifer: [16:20] Yeah, like one of the things I would say is, okay, Stacey, what are your, what are you currently doing right now? What are your student learning outcomes? How far into that are you? And, you know, can we use PowerPoints? How are your assignments structured now? A lot of things, a lot of the assignments can be uploaded digitally. Like majority of the faculty, they have a paper, they have to turn in, they have quizzes. All of those things can be moved online. So let's figure out, like those paper assignments that they submit. Can we move those online? Yes. Okay. Well, then if you have a PowerPoint, all you have to do is let's just add some notes to that. Let's make sure we utilize 365 to run the accessibility checker, makes sure that it's accessible. Let's upload that. There a lot of things that you can still do. If you have paper tests, we have our LMS. You can do that. Or do we have to give the test now? And the answer is yes or no. And if not, can we wait a couple of weeks? Can we do some alternative assignments? Can we bring in guest lecturers? Can, you know, those are some things we can do to kind of expand. Can we go back and revisit prior assignments and kind of use this time to, you know, review? Can we use this time to expand? Can we use this time for students to go out and do independent research online? You know, what about the final? Let's look at the final exam. What parts can we take out? Just those are some things I would ask you to tell me. So first, what are your learning objectives? How many of those have you met? I know we're a little more than halfway through the semester. So I'm thinking that you've gotten a majority of that done.

[18:14] One of the things we work on a lot is looking at our objectives and our activities and our assessments. And sometimes we have some fluff in there. What can be taken out? Can we

just get to the meat and bread? What is the objective? What activity specifically aligns to that and what is the assessment? And all the mayonnaise and the lettuce and the pickle can come off and we can just have two pieces of some bread and some meat and smash it. You know, I think that that would be the conversation we would have. Just take into consideration that as long as you communicate, throughout with your students, find out what's working, what's not working, and just adjust. You know, it's not gonna be perfect and it may not even be pretty, but we'll get the job done. You know?

Stacey: [19:01] That was Dr. Jennifer Townes, Associate Dean of Professional Development at Southwest Tennessee Community College. So one of the things that Jennifer mentioned several times was the impact on students and on faculty. And our next guest is going to talk to us a little bit about, about how faculty cannot just do a good job with their teaching, but also managing this very stressful situation and all the things that are required of them right now. So hi Joshua, would you mind introducing yourself and telling us a little bit about where you work?

Joshua Eyler: [19:42] I'm Joshua Eyler, I'm the Director of Faculty Development at University of Mississippi. And I lead teaching and learning initiatives, university-wide Critical Thinking Initiative, a lot of our major programming for developing more evidence-based practices.

Stacey: [19:58] And you're moving that stuff online this week?

Joshua: [20:01] We are indeed, moving everything online. Our students were on spring break last week, the announcement came late last week. And so this is going to be our big, our big push.

Stacey: [20:13] So, there's a lot of faculty out there who are nervous at what they have in front of them for the rest of the semester. So talk to us, what should we keep in mind moving forward?

Joshua: [20:24] Well, I think the best way to think about this, is no one is asking anyone to become an all-star online teacher, all at once. This is really about triage to remote learning. And what we had to keep in mind are the learning goals we have for students and the realities of what we as individual faculty can do, and we just need to do our best. No one will have any pressure, is putting any pressure on us to be, our own faculty, to be stellar at this. What we want to do is make sure our students are taken care of, make sure that they learn.

And make sure that the burden on faculty isn't too much for them to bear.

Stacey: [21:08] Yeah. There is going to be a big burden on faculty though, right? I mean, it's inevitable. Do you have any ideas for a face-to-face teacher looking at the prospect of going online, things they can do to sort of minimize that burden or be more efficient?

Joshua: [21:25] Yeah, I do. Well, I think the first thing, is just to take a deep breath and relax. And it's also really important to make sure that in this process, the faculty are taking care of themselves, as well. That the intensity and the stress and the pressure will be pretty high. And so we want to make sure people are taking care of themselves, as well. So that's the first thing and I think that's a basic thing that we need to keep in mind. The best advice that I have, honestly, is advice that Anne Lamott gave in her great book on teaching creative writing. And it's really, "take it bird by bird," step-by-step, little by little. You can't do it all at once. You can't even get every element of a course translated over to online. You have to take it a piece at a time. And gradually, those pieces will add up to what you need to do to get the remainder of your, of your course out there. So little by little, that's really important. Don't try and reinvent the wheel. There's tons of tools out there. Don't try and use the hardest one or the, or the one that you'd have to learn the most about. It doesn't have to look great. It doesn't have to be a rock star version of a lecture video. It just has to be recorded and out to your students. And so I think that's really important. I think stepping back and saying, ultimately, what do I want my students to have learned by the end of this semester? And what's the most efficient way that I can help them do that? Sometimes it'll be quick recorded lectures. Sometimes it'll be activities that they're, that they're responding to. Sometimes it might even be a Twitter back channel conversation where you're just talking to each other. So the translation from face-to-face, to online won't be perfect and it won't necessarily be smooth. And it won't look the same, but you can still achieve the same goals in these different formats.

Stacey: [23:29] That's great advice. The other thing that I worry about a little bit is when the first thing goes wrong, because you know with online teaching, especially with the kind we're doing, things are gonna go wrong. So the first time something goes wrong, I think it can be a little overwhelming. What would you say to faculty preparing to teach online when they run into that, that first big challenge?

Joshua: [23:55] Okay. Well, you need to, they need to go easy on themselves because the challenges are gonna happen and things are gonna go a little awry, at times. I think with

online teaching in general, but especially in the circumstance that we're in, flexibility is important. The other thing is a willingness to improv. A willingness and again, a comfortability with going off the blueprint. Oh, the video is not working. Let me just use the audio and talk to you. Or, ok, the platform's down, I'm gonna email the class and say, alright, well here are the questions I'm just going to ask you. Let's do it over this way this time. And then I'll work on getting the platform back up and running tomorrow, or something like that. And it's okay. It's okay when things go wrong, because they will, I think people just that kind of flexibility and willingness to go off book, needs to be a part of the pedagogy, not resistant to the pedagogy. So a truly flexible approach to teaching is really needed in this situation.

Stacey: [25:04] Awesome. Well is there anything else you wanted to share?

Joshua: [25:09] Yeah. You know, I think one of the things I've been talking to people a lot about is remembering that students are going to be very stressed and very anxious. And in some ways, the, the work that we are being asked to do right now, goes above and beyond just the content that we're teaching that are, just our presence, and making it a habit of communicating with them, just to see how they're doing sometimes is going to be as important or sometimes even more important than the content that we roll out over the next five to six weeks. We have to keep them at the center of it, in order to achieve any of the goals that we have for them. So I think that's really important to think about. I would also say another thing, just related to this stress and anxiety level. Now is the time, within the parameters of accrediting bodies, to think about instituting an alternate grading model. You've always wanted to try contract grading, or pass-fail, or something like that. Now's the time to do that. That's the kind of flexibility I was talking about earlier. Also will help students forget about the stress and the panic and allow them to learn since they won't be focused solely on getting the grades, right? Now I think is the time to really be thinking about grading as equity. And grading as a way that can alleviate some of the pressures that the students will feel right now.

Stacey: [26:43] Yeah, I think that's awesome. The idea that I have to translate these courses that I designed and that I know extremely well, into an online format. But my students have four or five different faculty members, four or five different courses that they really don't know what to expect. They have no idea what's coming. They have no control over the circumstances. So their panic levels are going to be even higher than ours, just from the lack of control. So thinking about ways that we can help them dial it down and realize we're all on the same team. Sounds like a great place to start.

Joshua: [27:18] Definitely.

Stacey: [27:23] That was Dr. Joshua Eyler, Director of Faculty Development at the University of Mississippi. If you are looking for more resources on teaching remotely, I'm going to encourage you to check out some of the blog posts and guides we've been producing here at the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching. I have also linked a few of the articles and Google Docs and other resources that I've been enjoying and relying on over the past couple of weeks, in case they're useful for you, as well. I'll add all of those links to the show notes. And also if you're on Facebook or Twitter, there are groups and hashtags popping up every day to help faculty and staff band together to make this huge shift in how we think about our teaching. In addition to Jennifer and Joshua, everywhere I look, I see higher education banding together, sharing resources and encouraging each other. I hope this episode can be an encouragement for some of you. Remember that we are going to make some mistakes and the technology will fail. And frankly, many of us are just anxious about what the future holds. So keep it simple. Take care of your students and please show yourself a lot of grace. We'd love to hear your thoughts on this episode and learn about the work you're involved in, if your institution is moving to remote teaching, please share links with us on social media or just add it to the comments on our website underneath the show notes. You can reach us via email at leadinglinespod@vanderbilt.edu or on Twitter @leadinglinespod. Leading Lines is produced by the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching and the Jean and Alexander Heard libraries. This episode was edited by me and Rhett McDaniel. Look for new episodes the first and third Mondays of each month. I'm Stacey Johnson standing in for your host, Derek Bruff. Stay well out there, everybody. You got this.