Compassionate Teaching Online

As the semester is drawing to its close in a few weeks, you may sense that your students are feeling the stresses, strains and fatigue of the worldwide pandemic crisis. Your students, their families and friends have been impacted directly or indirectly by COVID-19. With all of the challenges your students are experiencing, you are called to teach your students with **compassion, empathy and care**.

In this issue of the Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, we present four tips for compassionate online teaching. We also provide examples for how to approach & implement compassionate teaching in a fully-online asynchronous course environment.

Four Tips for Compassionate Teaching Online

Tip #1: Be present in your online course. Be authentic, consistent, and learner-focused. As supported by the "Trickle Down Engagement" teaching philosophy, your presence and engagement (as instructor) will positively impact students' engagement, and ultimately will facilitate their learning.

How to do this in your online course?
- Make sure that your instructor presence is visible to learners through regular and effective use of Blackboard announcements, email, discussion forums and other communication tools.
- Create an inclusive, supportive, and engaging climate in your online course, such as using learners' names and pronouns and using inclusive language (we/our/us).
- Promptly return all phone calls and emails that you receive from our students.
- Every time you check into your online course, leave some evidence to your students that you were there – *e.g.,* new announcement, discussion comment, etc.

Tip #2: Show your students that you are reasonable and empathetic. Your students may feel physically, emotionally, and academically exhausted and burnt out due to the pandemic's related stresses. Show your students compassion and care through your flexibility and assistance.

How to do this in your online course?
- Be reasonable & flexible with late policies and penalties, particularly if learners need extra time due to pandemic-related disruptions in their lives.
- Scaffold assignments into smaller chunks to keep student workload manageable. Scaffolding also will allow students to get feedback (from you) about their work along the way, as they complete larger projects or assignments.
- Check Performance Dashboard and Retention Center in your Blackboard course, reach out to students who are falling behind, and offer them tips to help them succeed.

Four Tips for Compassionate Teaching Online (continued)

Tip #3: Listen. Create an informal space for open & compassionate listening in your course. In an asynchronous online course, students don't have the opportunity to informally chat with each other (or with you) before and after class. Students have much going on right now, and they may want to share their thoughts in an informal dialogue with each other, and with you (as instructor).

How to do this in your online course?
- Create resources or optional activities intended to build a sense of social presence and community, such "Water Cooler", "Student Lounge" and/or "Ask Your Instructor" forums.
- Set ground rules to create a safe environment for open and compassionate communication, so that students know their ideas and viewpoints will be respected.
- Schedule brief (optional) Zoom sessions as "listening sessions", to allow class members to interact informally with each other in real time.

Tip #4: Share resources. Provide assistance to your students with tutorials for academic content, resources for online learning, and to direct students to university and community resources.

How to do this in your online course?
- Provide students with resources which are geared to learners studying online, such as Keep Learning website (Mason Learning Services). Direct students to Mason Learning Services for tips, resources and virtual workshops for skill development for time management, study planning and prioritizing.
- Provide links to technical support resources at Mason, and Blackboard Help Tutorials. Post the contact information and hours for Mason's Information Technology Services (ITS). Make students aware of where they may find information about ITS alerts and bulletins, including unplanned outages.
- Post a "first-aid kit" of information that your students can consult as personal needs arise. Include links to Mason resources for student health services, student emergency financial assistance, and counseling and psychological services. See the Stearns Center website for list of Student Support Resources on Campus.
- Reach out to individual students and work with them to prepare/share customized lists of resources for their specific needs.

Learn More!
- Bagar-Fraley, B. (2020, May 8). Offering compassion and care in online courses. *Faculty Focus*, Magna Publications. Accessed online November 28, 2020.

Contact Us!

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