

## Ep. 059: Keep Calm and Carry Online

Podcast: <https://ProDev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2020/ep059.shtml>

It's week one of completely online teaching at Illinois State University in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Claire and Jim reflect on this extraordinary shift in teaching and learning. They discuss how the new reality has forced us all to be "life-long learners" and how to carry on that example to our students. Plus, they briefly rundown the extensive support available to faculty and students at Illinois State.

### Transcript

JIM: Hi there, I'm Jim,

CLAIRE: and I'm Claire.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching.

[Music playing]

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee and joining me today, once again, our director Dr. Claire Lamonica and when I say here from Illinois State University, that's more metaphorical than... right Claire?

CLAIRE: Absolutely. you're in one place; I'm in another place, and neither of us is at Illinois State University right now.

JIM: You know we're in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and so, here in the State of Illinois, we are all in our staying at home, and working from home, we just wanted to kind of quickly... This is not how we envisioned coming back from our winter hiatus, but, we should also apologize because our audio quality is not up to our usual impeccable standards. So, Claire, how are you?

CLAIRE: I'm good. You know I like people, and so it's kind of weird just being in my house, but I also am finding that I am getting a lot of face time with people via Zoom. One day this week, I had six Zoom meetings so, that was, I think, that was my high, you know. There's only about eight hours in a working day so I couldn't have had many more; so, I'm seeing a lot of faces even if I'm not seeing a lot of bodies.

JIM: Well, and I think that's kind of the important message. You know, we would just want to record a quick little episode today. We're not going to go into a lot of nuts and bolts about teaching online. We have a lot of online resources we can point people to. I think, we're a week into the official teaching online phase; so, we were working with faculty for a few weeks before to get them ready to teach online, but classes have been going on all week. We're recording this on Friday, March 27th, and so we just kind of wanted to talk about how things have changed. Then, the new reality and how we are still able to connect with people, but it's a different way of connecting, I guess, what's your impression from this week, in your thoughts, and what do we need to...

What do you think we all need to keep top of mind as we spend the next, well, the rest of this semester at ISU delivering courses online?

CLAIRE: Yeah, you know, I think the main thing I'm seeing is a lot of anxiety. I think our faculty, because of the nature of our university, our faculty are very invested in their teaching, and I said in an email to one of our listservs, you know, this is pushing us, this is pushing all of us way outside our comfort zone, and so, the response to that, of course, is anxiety. That's an appropriate response, and so, I think, you know, it's really important for people to remember that there's no one right way to do this. It really depends on the kind of course you're teaching and the kind of students you have and your own comfort level with technology, various, you know, different technologies. I know people who are, basically have, reverted to a correspondence course using email, and that's okay. That, you know, that works for them, that works for their students, and then, you know, we have people who are really experienced online instructors who were not intending to go online this semester but are really comfortable with that. So, they probably have anxiety because of having to do this so quickly, make the shift quickly, but at least they're in more familiar territory when they get there.

JIM: Absolutely, and we'll kind of loop back to some of those Instructors, because we want to talk about how we've helped connect faculty on campus with some of the their more experienced colleagues, and there's really a great thing going on with faculty helping each other, but when you're talking about anxiety, the first thing that went to my mind is also, obviously, we need to keep in mind that our students are going through very anxious times. I taught my course, this semester. We met online. Most of us were able to meet online on Monday night, and it was kind of hard. I almost got a little weepy at one point.

CLAIRE: Oh, you're such a teddy bear.

JIM: That usually doesn't, well you know, as men get older, we get weepier, but that's a whole other podcast.

CLAIRE: [Laughing] Completely different; yeah.

JIM: But it was, but they were, and this was the first Monday. This is Monday night; so this is the first day back learning after this unexpected extended spring break, and they were all tired and their sleep schedules are all messed up, and they, there was a lot of anxiety expressed. I thought it was valuable that we were able to take some time in class to talk about that, and we always kept it in the context, of okay, well how are we going to change things to make it work? You know, you don't have to do that all the time but I think that was valuable, and honestly, after talking to them, I have now, I don't know, I'm on, like plan D or E at this point, but I'm, um, I got feedback from them again, and I think one message we want to express to our faculty is... Now that we've actually been doing this online... We have talked a lot about planning for weeks, but now that we're actually doing this online, it's okay to reassess things at this point, and if you still need to make adjustments, make adjustments, you know, communicate those with your students, but, you know, this is going to be an ongoing process.

CLAIRE: Absolutely. I think it's going to be an ongoing process in terms of... I know people are having to change up assignments. My, husband is teaching classical sports communication, and his students at this point in the semester, were all supposed to be attending live sporting events. That's not happening. So, you know, that required a lot of assignment readjustment, and, I and you know... Certainly, he's not at all alone; there's lots of people out there having to readjust their schedules and their assignments, in addition, to it readjusting, you know, how they're teaching so that's, crazy. You know, it's been a crazy time, it has, it really has, and I, you know, I hope everybody is being kind of themselves. And, it was actually in a meeting with the Provost the other day, when she was talking to the department chairs and the school directors, and, she said, "did you know we, really, we're pretty hard on ourselves, and I think we need to remember that, you know, this isn't probably going to be your best teaching semester ever". It's okay. It's going to be good enough. It's, whatever you're doing, it's going to be good enough. Do something, and keep your students learning, and, you know, this semester will be good, as a good enough semester.

JIM: Absolutely, and, you know, along those lines, how you communicate that message, let me put it that way, is going to be important to students. So, we're taking a, you know, we have to understand that our teaching is going to be good enough, and if we make it just good enough, then we can expect our students to do the work, and it's communicating to the students that, yes, you still need to do the work. We can't just check out for the rest of the semester.

CLAIRE: No, none of us can do that.

JIM: Right, right, so, but by being gentle with ourselves, and by recognizing that there are just inherent limits because of the new system that we're working under, then we can work within that system, and then we could communicate high expectations to our students.

CLAIRE: And, I think, you know, there are a couple of things that go along with that, one of them is once you get comfortable with the basics, you know you may decide that you want to try some new things. Maybe you want to try a new tool. Maybe, if you want it, maybe you want to try to bring in a guest speaker into your class, or maybe, you want to, you want to share your screen and show students how to how to do something, or, you know, whatever. I would say don't be afraid to try new things because in that... Actually, what you're, doing right now, and as you try new things, is modeling being a lifelong learner. You know, all the time, about the importance of preparing students to be lifelong learners. You know, the world is going to change, we tell them we can't teach you everything, you're going to need to know in the future. Well, WOW! he world just changed and there is no way that any of us could have been prepared for this particular situation, you know, I mean it's just, I mean unless you spend all your time reading dystopian and plague novels and zombie, and, you know... The Stand, and whatever. You probably haven't spent a lot of time thinking about preparing for this kind of situation. So, this is a great chance for you to not only be a lifelong learner, but let your students seeing you, see you, being a lifelong learner and share that with them, you know, let them know, wow, you may have to, you may, someday, face whatever I'm preparing you to do now. You may someday be faced with a challenge

that you could never have anticipated, and this is hard for me, you know. I think you know I'm a big proponent of being upfront with students that, you know, this is hard for me, but I'm working really hard to make it work for you, and I need your help in that, but we're going to move forward together.

JIM: And, we're all going to.

CLAIRE: be learners in multiple ways this semester.

JIM: and then it's also, yes, and then it's, possible to also believably challenge, yeah because, I think students need that, that boost right now.

CLAIRE: Oh yeah, they need to know that we, you know, they need to know that we think they can do this. You know when, Ken Bain talks about the importance of maintaining high expectations for students, and kind of, you know, debunking this myth that students prefer easy classes and things like that. The key is to, you know, maintain high expectations and provide support for them to reach those expectations. So, you know, it may take some different kinds of support right now, but there are resources available to help you. So, you know, if you have a student struggling with technology, you know, have them get in touch with the technology support center that's there, and make sure that they know about the Redbirds Keep Learning sight. We've been talking a lot about Redbirds Keep Teaching to faculty but there's a mirror site called Redbirds Teach Learning, [laughing] , or Redbirds Keep Learning. We do have, Redbirds Keep Learning, and it has a lot of resources for students, including mental health. So, I just had somebody email me yesterday about, worried about, a student who was exhibiting, you know, pretty obvious signs of distress and anxiety, and wanting to know if there was still any University support for those students; and yes, there is. If you go to, Redbirds Keep Learning, there's a whole section on mental health support for students. So, you know, keep pointing your students to that site, and familiarize yourself with it, but keep pointing them there as well.

JIM: So, one other thing that we wanted to kind of loop back on and talk about today was how faculty members are also supporting each other, so, we have a ReggieNet site, Online Teaching Mentors. Talk about that.

CLAIRE: Yeah, you know this actually, the sort of, seed for this idea came from the Provost's office, we were looking around for a way to extend CTLT's support of faculty using technology. You know, it became obvious that we needed to extend our ability for faculty to just get support for their teaching, as well, not just the technology side of it; so, we did create this ReggieNet site it's called, Online Teaching Mentors. If you are an instructor at Illinois State University, you are enrolled in that site as a participant, and it should be appearing in your ReggieNet sites. If you're not seeing it, you may have to go up to the waffle and look for it. It'll be under continuing sites or projects or whatever they call that. Go in there. We have highly experienced, highly successful online instructors who are serving as mentors. They are monitoring conversations in forums and answering questions, and they're also, some of them have also made available, made themselves available, for one-on-one conversations, and appointments. So that's a, that you know, is obviously not all the peer-to-peer support

is coming through that site. I think, I think there's a lot going on in there, but I've been impressed with the way that departmental colleagues have stepped up and helped each other and people of the college level are helping each other, so, there's a lot of peer mentoring and peer support going on out there. I've been, I've been using this, you know, new hashtag , #It Takes a Campus, because it really does, you know, it's like #It Takes a Campus. It's, you know, this isn't something that CTLT or the Provost office or your college IT people or your department share. There's this, this unique, moment in history, is taking on all of us working together to make sure, that Redbirds Keep Teaching and Redbirds Keep Learning.

JIM: And, so, we will link to that. Oh, I should also mention, by the way, that from a communication standpoint, I agree certainly that discussion in the forums has been great, and there have been questions raised there that we have then added elsewhere, and all of the online resources because were really good questions that we needed to find answers for, so, and we link, will have the instructions on the show page on how to get to that, and of course, that's also on the Redbirds Keep Teaching website; which is itself along with Redbirds Keep Learning, linked off of the university's main coronavirus response page that everyone has been emailed and whatnot. So, we'll make sure that people can find all of these resources online.

CLAIRE: I, you know, I'll just say to you, thanks for being a lifelong learner and figuring out how we could, how we can do this. I, we will apologize to everybody about the, any possible quality glitches in this particular podcast. We are learning as we, create the podcast. I have learned that I need to find myself, some, a headset with a microphone, but that if we do this again, before the pandemic is over, I will, I'll try to have some better equipment, but I appreciate everybody letting us come in with this, good enough podcast.

JIM: Well said. Claire thank you so much.

CLAIRE: Thank you Jim.

[music playing]

JIM: And that's it for this episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out much more about, well everything that we've been talking about, today. You can go to [CTLT.IllinoisState.edu](https://CTLT.IllinoisState.edu). You'll see a big button on the front page that says get started. For Dr. Claire Lamonica, for all of my colleagues at the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, until we talk again. Stay safe.