

Ep. 063: COVID-19 - Students Speak

Podcast: <https://ProDev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2020/ep063.shtml>

To say the Fall 2020 semester has been a challenge is to undersell it. But still, students say they're having positive learning experiences despite the global pandemic and all it means for higher education. In this episode, we talk with three returning Illinois State undergraduates, who bring a unique perspective about how things have changed since last fall. They share what their professors are doing to help them. They highlight the communication practices, flexibility, and organization that helps them to succeed. Plus, they emphasize the importance of empathy and genuine concern in the student-teacher relationship.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there, I'm Jim,

MEGAN: I'm Megan,

MICAH: I'm Micah,

CLAIRE: and I'm Claire.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching.

[Music]

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, I have three special guests for our program. This is a first for Let's Talk Teaching. We have some students on to talk about the student perspective of student absences and attendance here in this era of Covid19. So, joining me today, first of all let's start off with Megan who's a sophomore in communication sciences and disorders. Hi Megan.

MEGAN: Hi everyone.

JIM: And also joining me is Micah. Micah is a food and nutrition major. So, you're in family and consumer sciences.

MICAH: Yes, I am.

JIM: And you're a sophomore as well. Is that right?

MICAH: I am.

JIM: Well welcome, and also Claire is with us. Claire is a marketing sophomore. Hi Claire.

CLAIRE: Hi, thank you for having me.

JIM: Well, thank you all for being here. This was something that we were originally talking about organizing before the school year started, but you know, things changed, and changed again, and then changed again. So, we're recording this about, uh, three weeks into the semester. So, I think the natural question to start out with and any of you can kind of jump in. How's it going?

CLAIRE: Not too bad, personally, um, the first week of course it's always just different with everything being online, but I'm been able to communicate with my teachers and, also, everything being on, like ReggieNet and my teachers just having that open communication through zoom calls and also emails, um, it's been able to be a pretty smooth transition.

MICAH: I agree, um, it's all gone a lot better than I thought it would than I anticipated, um, I'm settling into a routine now in this third week of school and I'm happy, I'm sad that we're not all together like we were last year on campus, but um for the most part, yes, I'm enjoying it.

MEGAN: I agree with both Micah and Claire. It's... The first week was quite hectic, just getting everything together online, and kind of figuring out how the layout works, but working... The professors have all been really understanding and patient with us, and we've all kind of been learning and working through this together.

JIM: Well that's great to hear. So, let me ask all of you, are all of your classes online or do any of you have any sort of face-to-face or clinical component that you're working through this semester?

MEGAN: All of mine are online. I, we still use zoom for it. Most of mine are synchronous sometimes there's a little variation depending on what we do that week but none of mine are in person.

MICAH: I had a couple that, um, were on zoom, and I have a couple that are just work at your own pace, and I did have a chemistry lab that was in person. Well it was a hybrid in person so sometimes we were online sometimes we were in class, but that actually got cancelled starting from now on.

CLAIRE: Yeah, and I'm the same way I have five online classes and two of them meet virtually through zoom um at certain times each week, but then um the other three are all asynchronous.

JIM: Interesting. So, it, you know, no one used words like synchronous and asynchronous outside of my profession, uh, until now, but it's very interesting to hear students use the terminology because it's kind of the new reality that we're working through. Let me just, let's stay kind of at a high altitude here, for a moment. Before we talk about absences and attendance and your perspectives on that. What are some, some, particular practices that you are finding very helpful, that your professors are doing, and maybe if you could highlight one or two, that you think they could improve upon.

CLAIRE: I really enjoy that a lot of my professors have really flexible zoom office hours just because I'm working two part-time jobs right now and so just kind of, um, getting that

feel where I'm like working like at 10 a.m for instance. Um, my professor is able to change their, um, zoom office hours for me. It's like 9:30 instead of like 10 to 11.

JIM: Cool. Micah?

MICAH: Something that I've noticed my some of my professors have done, most of them, all of them, have been really great about communicating. I get emails almost every day from each of them. Just, how are you guys hope you're doing well please let me know if I can help you with anything. Here's exactly what you need to do. That has been great because sometimes I just feel like I'm going crazy with all the classes and all the information. Another thing that has been really helpful is that a few of my professors have given out their phone numbers, and just said contact me during these hours, um, don't go crazy, obviously, um, but just if you need something please let me know, and they've been very quick to respond.

MEGAN: Um, I know, for me some of my professors will upload the Power Points after the lecture and that way I'm still able to go back and review the material from class if I missed anything which has been super helpful. And just having like the schedule of homework laid out really nicely on ReggieNet is also helpful to just kind of stay on top of things in case you missed something they said in class.

CLAIRE: So, my professors are, um, like actually recording their zoom lectures so like during class. If I'm not able to, like have time to ask a question, or when I'm reviewing my notes after class and I realize like oh I forgot to write that down or something, I'm able to go back and look.

JIM: Great, I was actually going to ask you about recordings because that was one thing, so we had a discussion, a similar discussion which will be in a separate episode from this one with faculty members, about how they're working with students to cope with what we expect are going to be more extended absences because of the of the Covid19 pandemic. One of the techniques was to record the class sessions, so you mentioned, Claire, recorded lectures are... Uh, any of your professors... and this is for any of you or any of your professors recording the entire zoom class session. And the, okay, so you're all nodding. So, so uh, I'll go ahead and ask this question. Are you okay with that? Do you feel like you can still participate fully in class even though you know you're being recorded?

CLAIRE: I personally am okay with it. Um, I usually don't ask questions, like, verbally, but I send it in the chat just so that the other students are able to hear if they lack that audio connection, or something, but I personally enjoy it just because also I'm able to see the other students questions in case um I had a similar question.

MICAH: Yeah, I agree. My lecture that's being recorded um is not very interactive yet. Um, so yeah, most questions are asked in the chat, um, but I really don't mind it being recorded because in the end it's just very, very, helpful.

MEGAN: Yeah, it doesn't really bother me either you kind of forget that it's recording once you're focusing on the class material, anyways, and it's really just, um, supposed to be like a supplemental material later so nothing negative I don't think.

MICAH: I have trying to be very careful and making sure I'm on mute during those classes that are recorded sometimes I'll, you know, say something to a family member or be drinking my loud water bottle and I'll be like, "oh my goodness I wasn't on mute, but..."

JIM: Well now that, now that, you bragged about having a loud water bottle we may have to hear it here before the end of the show. But that's okay

MICAH: Oh, I hope not.

JIM: No pressure. So, uh, let's, let's move on and talk a little bit about attendance. So, it sounds like you all have synchronous sessions or at least partially synchronous sessions so what have you heard from your professors this semester as far as the expectations for attendance?

MEGAN: Um, my professors, they don't really require to, or they don't take attendance, but they still expect us to show up if we want to get the full, um, positive outcome out of this class as if we were still in person. So, it's highly recommended that we show up to all of them.

MICAH: I agree, my recorded lecture that one probably has a little bit lower attendance because it's at 8 a.m and not everybody wants to get up at that time. And since, I mean, he told us you can watch us at 3 am. I don't care when you watch it. Just make sure you watch it. Um, that has been fine. I do have a class where it's very conversation based so to miss out on some of those conversations and discussions it would be, not, it wouldn't be, in your favor to miss those because you need it, you need those, that information, for the papers that we write.

CLAIRE: And then, for my classes that are over Zoom, also, both of them are being recorded which is nice, and both my professors from the very beginning like the first day of class said like "If you guys do get sick or anything please just let me know, and I'm totally able to work around, and we'll give you guys extensions and stuff." So, that's really helpful as well.

JIM: Well, this is interesting because in, in, that other episode, which again we'll link to in the in the show notes. For this episode, the theme that kept coming up was communication, about how important it is not only for faculty to communicate often, perhaps, more often than they normally would with their students because of this whole environment that we're in, but also, to set those expectations for the students that they should communicate. So, it sounds to me like that's been done and for most of your classes. Is that, is that accurate?

MICAH: Yeah.

JIM: Let me ask you this, as far as absences go, my sense is that we've all been fairly healthy so far this semester so that's good, um, we are seeing, as we're recording this, we're seeing the, the, positivity rate of uh test results on campus have, have, increased rather dramatically. Um, now those numbers are among people who are, who are, I think showing symptoms so I think that's one reason why that number is so high but still you know we, we, expected a surge in in illnesses this semester and it looks like

we're going to get it. From a student perspective, what can faculty members do, what can professors do to help you in case you do get sick? So imagine, you're not feeling too good, you have to be in quarantine for a couple weeks, you know hopefully it's not serious enough to where you're hospitalized or something, but you're just not functioning at 100, what would you hope that your professors could do for you?

CLAIRE: Um, I so, last year, um, in the very beginning of march when we went back for spring break and then everything turned back online, I was actually pretty sick. I had a really bad sinus infection, and just, I had a really bad cold and so I was able to tell my professors and everything and some of them, my doctors note and they were just really um like just helpful with me because they were like if you ever need to like have an extension on something, or if you ever need me to meet with you outside of class, like I totally get it, and um, I so far I've seen at the professors this semester doing the exact same thing, and that personally helps me a lot because I know that whenever I'm really sick, I just don't I feel like, I almost want the motivation, I just don't have the energy to do anything like how I normally am when I'm healthy, you know, um, so that's really helpful to me personally.

MICAH: I agree, and one thing that I've noticed is that the professors are just, really, they really want to know how you are as a person health-wise, mentally, they just, "are you happy are you okay?" Um, they are really prioritizing that, and especially when, yeah, last March, when the quarantine first began. Um, I had a professor who... I just had one question, and we've talked about the question for probably about five minutes, and then for another 25 minutes she just talked and just connected with me and related to, with me, and that was it was really helpful to know that the professors care, and I know that that was, that probably took up a lot of her time where she had other things to get done. Um, I mean we were all kind of going crazy during that, but um, it was really special to know that the professors really do care. So, keeping that up, also, consistent communication which all my professors have done really, really, well with, that, um, and just keeping ReggieNet updated showing the due dates as much as possible it has all been really helpful, and if I was sick I would appreciate all of those things even more.

MEGAN: And just to kind of add to that, I would say that like the flexible office hours are really important because whenever you're missing out on class sometimes it's just best if you can meet with the professor and they'll go over things with you and that's super helpful if you've missed it. Because sometimes, reading over the notes doesn't help explain everything that was covered in class that day. Plus, what's cool, with Zoom is that you're able to actually like share your screen during the office hours so your professors know exactly what your questions are like, exactly where you're having issues.

JIM: So, one general question to wrap it up here. What is the number one piece of advice you would give? Either one of your professors or just professors in general on campus as far as working with students for the rest of the semester? What's one general piece of advice that you would want to want them to hear?

CLAIRE: Just continuing open communication, um, what's really hard for me is that like I have designated times during the day where I'll do like a specific class and so I'll email my professor if I have a question during that time, and just having my professors all of them so far been able to respond within a short amount of times like literally like five minutes sometimes, and that just really helps because, um, you know, I am working I'm like doing lots of other things, you know, just like with my business fraternity. All virtually, and just like other stuff like that it's just really helpful for them being able to communicate so quickly, and...

MICAH: I agree, Claire, um, I would encourage professors to continue to stay organized and to encourage their students to stay organized. Personally, I usually buy a planner for every school year and usually it's, I mean, not the size of a piece of paper probably half of that and it's small but still gets the job done. I actually upgraded to a very large planner this semester, just because I knew I was going to have a lot, a lot, to write down and it really has helped me to stay organized. So yeah, I would just say consistency and communication and organization and encourage your students to do the same.

MEGAN: Yeah, yep, I agree with both of those and I would also just add, like, keep on uploading the lecture notes and keep a clear schedule laid out for the students just so that we can all stay organized because I know that we're all taking a lot of different classes and so sometimes when everything is online it's hard to find the different resources and things that we need to complete each assignment. So, it's just very helpful whenever we have it all laid out nicely.

JIM: All right, well great advice. So, Claire, Micah, Megan, thank you so much for joining us today.

CLAIRE, MICAH, MEGAN: Thank you, thank you for having us.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this episode of Let's Talk Teaching. Find out more about our podcast and also resources for instructors to continue teaching in the fall of 2020 and beyond, online, go to CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. For Claire, Micah, Megan, and for all of my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, until we talk again, Happy Teaching