

## **Learner-Centered Teaching Strategies in the COVID-19 Era**

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## **Introduction**

Over 80% of students globally were impacted by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) disease (Sahu, 2020). For many students, their education shifted from in-person to distance learning (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Educators also experienced dramatic changes, as many were tasked with teaching via a new medium. The educational landscape remains uncertain for the 2020-2021 school year; however, it is likely many educators will be asked to teach some, or all, of their content using an online platform. Maintaining a learner-centered classroom, in which learners are responsible for their learning and teachers act as facilitators (Schroeder, 2012), during the COVID-19 pandemic is equally challenging and essential. In this presentation, a team representing four disciplines, four universities, and both 1890 and 1862 Land-Grant institutions will (a) examine new opportunities within online learning environments, (b) introduce principles of learner-centered teaching (LCT), (c) explore games as an LCT approach, and (d) consider methods for assessing learning, all within in-person, hybrid, and online educational contexts. In this abstract, we introduce the four components of the presentation, outline the presentation structure, and conclude with anticipated participant outcomes from engaging in the presentation.

## **Presentation Elements**

### **Examining New Opportunities for Learners Online**

Online learning in higher education is now divided into pre-COVID and post-COVID. Pre-COVID, the conversion of university courses to an online format was a slow and deliberate process. In Florida, the goal for undergraduate online classes offered by the university system was 40% by 2025 (Board of Governors, 2019) but in the Fall 2020 semester, the remote and online undergraduate course offerings in each of the Florida's eleven universities will exceed 80%, creating new challenges for both instructors and learners. This rapid change to online instruction has introduced new challenges but it has also created new opportunities. This element of the presentation will examine how the areas of flexibility, communication, and evaluation may introduce new opportunities for online learners. Flexibility has been identified as an advantage of online instruction experienced by both learners and instructors (Davis et al., 2019). This option may be leveraged to reduce the external forces promoting educational disparities. Online communication presents a wide variety of communication formats that may be utilized to encourage student learning. Evaluating student mastery of material has always been at the heart in comparing online and traditional methods of instruction and online provides the instructor with greater opportunities to use the evaluation process as a learning tool. This session will review the advantages the introduction of online courses may have for the learner.

### **Introduction to Learner-Centered Teaching Strategies**

This innovative element of the presentation will give an introduction to LCT strategies and provide examples of LCT initiatives for faculty across disciplines through four major activities: (a) faculty development seminars (through the academic year) via zoom connect, professional *Learner-Centered Teaching (LCT)* conferences, (b) summer teacher institute training and professional development and educational enrichments incorporating LCT approaches; (c) LCT service learning initiatives, (d) professional development for faculty through LCT National

Teaching Conferences, and (e) developing collaborative teaching partnerships and exchanges between 1890 and 1862 faculty to enhance LCT knowledge and skills.

### **Incorporating Games as a Learner-Centered Teaching Strategy**

Educational games provide a unique opportunity to offer learner-centered instruction within postsecondary classrooms. Effective educational games increase student motivation and ownership of their learning through competition (King et al., 2014). Not surprisingly, learners prefer educational games over traditional, lecture-based experiences (van Eck, 2006). While the benefits of gameplay in educational spaces are comprehensive (e.g., creative thinking, problem solving, collaboration), there remains a dearth of games played in postsecondary classrooms (Fox & Loope, 2007). Therefore, this element of the presentation will (a) introduce participants to the utility of games in educational spaces, (b) illustrate how games adhere to the principles of LCT, and (c) showcase an example educational game (i.e., The Leaders Game) adaptable to both in-person and online instruction.

### **Assessment Strategies for Learner-Centered Teaching**

Due the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of assessment has taken a new meaning resulting in renewed efforts to look for effective assessment strategies. Institutions of higher education have changed their instructional delivery for fall 2020 to four different modes—in-person, mixed-mode (hybrid), remote (synchronous), and web (asynchronous). These changes in instructional delivery have challenged instructors to not only revise their course offerings but also rethink assessment strategies. The question is, how can you maintain instructional quality in this changed academic environment? According to the Illinois Online Network (2005), instructors must design appropriate learning experiences for effective learning. In designing such learning experiences, instructors must consider the purpose of assessment, the criteria being measured, and the intended outcomes (Gaytan, 2002). Several assessment strategies have been found to be effective. These include clearly explained assignments; continual, immediate, and detailed feedback; and reinforcement techniques (Radhakrishna, Ewing, & Thorn, 2019), use of rubrics, self-assessments, discussion boards, peer assessments, and rubrics to assess both chat room discussions and quality of interactions (Gaytan & McEwen, 2007). These are extremely important strategies as they provide opportunities for instructors to monitor student progress and to see the assessment strategies used are working or need modification. During this section of the presentation, tips for creating online assessments will be discussed.

### **Presentation Structure and Expected Outcomes**

Our session will begin with a five-minute introduction to the four faculty presenters. Then, each faculty member will be given equal time to facilitate their presentation element. After each of the four presenters have shared, there will be a ten-minute opportunity for participants to pose questions and gain clarity through a dialogue with faculty presenters. The objective of this ten-minute conversation will be to empower participants to implement LCT strategies, games, and effective assessment within their 2020-2021 course offerings. Participation in this session is expected to result in (a) the identification of new opportunities within online learning environments; (b) increased awareness of LCT strategies; and (c) increased utilization of games in instruction; and (d) a deeper understanding of assessment for in-person, hybrid, and online contexts. Further, the diversity of the four faculty presenters is expected to be a model for future Learner-Centered Teaching collaborations and presentations.

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