



Radio Free CSU: CFA and COVID-19

Episode 3 – The Great Adaptation: Changes to Teaching and Learning

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Audrena Redmond: Hello, and welcome to Radio Free CSU, the official podcast of the California Faculty Association. I'm Audrena Redmond, your host. Starting in mid-February, counties across our state began declaring emergencies due to COVID-19. By March 4, Governor Newsom had declared a state of emergency and ordered us to physically distance. In other words, folks, stay at home.

That meant schools and universities were no longer providing in-person instruction, and by mid-March, the 23 California State University campuses transitioned to virtual learning following Governor Newsom's shelter-in-place order. Within a matter of days, the vast majority of 28,000 faculty were working to create virtual learning experiences for their students. Many worked through their Spring Break. They did this without the benefit of weeks, and months, normally invested in true online learning experiences. This swift transition wasn't without its bumps, and certainly it was made clear that despite our culture's embrace of technology, not all of us are fluent in it, or have access for spaces to use technology comfortably.

Joining me today to talk about changes to teaching and learning in the age of COVID-19 are George Station of the Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment at CSU MB; Susan Frawley, a lecturer in the Department of Multicultural and Gender Studies at CSU Chico; and Vanessa Lopez-Littleton, associate professor of Health, Human Services and Public Policy at CSU MB, and senator for academic senate of the California State University. Welcome everybody.

Right. So let's just get right in this because this is what's pressing in on people's minds today given something's about announcements. Can you all speak a little bit about your experience with the sudden switch to virtual learning? I mean, it was you know well into the semester I mean everybody was looking at Spring Break, which means we're halfway through the semester, and then all of a sudden there's a switch to virtual learning for the online classes. Would you say it was easy for you? What was difficult? What changes had to be made to meet the learning objectives of your courses? And that's particularly to Vanessa and Susan.

Vanessa Lopez-Littleton: Hi, this is Vanessa. I'll go first. I think this semester was particularly challenging because you'd already prepare to teach and deliver the class one way and then mid-semester we had to come to a full stop and re-envision the class to move to just a virtual class. And I think for me because I



have experience teaching online, I want to say that I had like this toolbox to rely on. But I felt like that toolbox almost wasn't gonna do it this semester, because typically when I develop an online class, I know that 100 percent of my students have access to the internet and everything that they need. So, this, you know, during the course of the semester, there's no way for me to know if students have access to the things that they need to be successful online. So I think from the start, there were just some inherent challenges, and you know I applaud my colleagues, as well as our students who I think really did a good job of pulling this semester out and making it a success. One of the things that I will say, was a little bit interesting at the beginning for me is I, I live on East Campus which is a housing component to our campus. And one day I had a class scheduled for 8am, and the previous night, I found out my internet was down and stayed down all night, and when I got up in the morning at seven o'clock I still couldn't access the internet. So I just grabbed all of my stuff and when I got in my car and drove down a block or two and sat in my car and did my 8am lecture just because there was, you know, there was no option. And so, since then the campus has loaned me a hotspot. So in addition to my internet in my home, I now also have a hotspot, which I'm using right now. It works very well. And so, you know, I, I've tried to encourage all of my colleagues to reach out to the campus to kind of get that hotspot as well. And so I'll stop there.

Audrena Redmond: Susan or George, want to share anything?

Susan Frawley: Go ahead, George.

George Station: Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to add one thing to what Vanessa had mentioned that it's not just students who will need that support from her example, it's clear that faculty, also need that support. That was kind of unexpected when everything was happening in mid-March, but it became clear very quickly that our faculty colleagues needed the same type and the same level of support that our students needed. And that's going to continue into the summer and fall.

Audrena Redmond: What kind of things you hearing from your colleagues about their experience? I know it was a rough transition for a lot of folks, especially if you had no experience in in teaching online. What would, you know, I imagine that someone who is who teaches, an English class for example, might have one virtual learning experience than someone who teaches a chemistry lab would have. This would mean something completely different for them because of experiments and what have you, they might have in the class so can you, can you give us an idea of the kinds of things you've heard in your various capacities?

Vanessa Lopez-Littleton: I'll be a little bit cliché in that I'll say faculty are literally all over the all over the place. Right. And so there's some faculty who are able to just hit the ground running. They, you know, regardless if they had experience or not, they were very flexible. And then there were other faculty who were really struggling. And I think, on our campus I know, and George can speak to this put together a group of mentors to be able to provide mentoring for individual faculty, and I know some of my colleagues, took advantage of that. But I think just, you know, I'm hearing about like in nursing students initially weren't able to go and finish up their clinical site, clinical rotations. And then I think toward the end of the



semester, there was a reprieve made so that they would be able to finish up their rotations this semester. Some of my colleagues in a sciences, who had computer labs or who had, you know, biology labs, and they weren't able to interact with their students that way. So, they did a really good job of coming up with alternative assignments, but those alternative assignments, often fail in comparison to the rich experience that they would have gotten in the classroom. So, you know, I think that there, that's just one of the kind of inherent challenges in moving to this alternative modality.

Susan Frawley: Vanessa spoke very well of that. I was just thinking about the fact that I also do a majority of my teaching online. And so for me it was very easy to move over because I already had so much of my face to face classes, already on electronic use but my officemate never uses electronic things. He, he went in, so when he found out that we were going online. He was absolutely floored he had no idea what to do with his class so we had a quick course in how to bring his class online and I've been thinking about the fact that now that we're going to be online for the next semester that I'm going to need to get in contact with him and see what I can do to help him because he's also going to have to be teaching online for next semester, I think it's, it's like she said there's so it's, it depends on the class it depends on the instructor. There's a lot of different challenges and experiences that are going to come out of this.

George Station: Ok, because I work with a lecturer cohort in our office of teaching, learning and assessment -- and most of the people in the cohort did not plan on teaching online, they weren't teaching online. I think one of them was. And the rest were just thrown in the deep end to make it work -- I heard quite a few stories. There was a range of experiences, the first several weeks, and trying to do too much, maybe trying to do everything without having time to think about, you know, what can you do or not do. We just got to get on with things, so there were a lot of all nighters being pulled by faculty that kind of thing a lot of extra work being put in. The faculty who had a slightly better experience out of the gate, I think, had a chance or basically took the chance to stop, slow down, just to make sure their students were doing all right, make sure their students were getting settled off campus that kind of thing. And worry less about the nuts and bolts of how do I teach this online, but making those connections from teacher to student from faculty to student, and that was a big difference for some of the faculty that I worked with

Vanessa Lopez-Littleton: Audrena, I do have another point that George just makes me think, and that's this notion of equity, like, I just, I'm constantly struck by some of our students who have limited access to resources. I remember and even faculty. We had a faculty on my campus, who was trying to do her, her, her, her class from her iPhone. Matter of fact, she didn't have an iPhone, it wasn't even an iPhone, it was like an Android, and I ended up having to log into a course to send her students a message because it wasn't working. And so, you know, we take it for granted that we can sit in our homes and we have access to the internet to the technology to the things that we need. But some of our colleagues really don't. And, you know, and I think that this, you know, situation has done nothing more than shine the light on some of these inequalities that we have, where people just simply don't have access to some of the basic things



that we know that many of us take for granted. You know, I, you may even think about like students. You know I think about students not only having access to the technology, but even access to quiet places where they can study. Students have said that they've had family members walking in and out while they're trying to interact on you know doing presentations in the class, you know the virtual classroom. We've had dogs barking and just just my neighbor actually had posted on Twitter, where she had her desk in the corner of her room because her husband was also a K-12 teacher had to take over the living room to do his classes, and his you know all of his assignments and activities down downstairs and her daughter had set up a little desk next to her, and that ended up in an article on our campuses page. And I thought it was so cute and so poignant because the faculty member was actually complaining that not only did she have to do her work, but then she had to sit here at the same time trying to you know provide daycare and an education for her child who was sitting right next to her. While it was cute, you know, it just kind of exemplified the difficulties that a lot of folks are having right now.

Audrena Redmond: You know it's truly the added stress and for students if this is not something that you voluntarily signed up for. It's been offered and so you started Vanessa with the story of value students having family members come in, or while they're doing their presentations on dogs barking or, or, you know, we've all had been on calls and seen that the cats walking across the keyboard or what have you, but that you know those are those things are adorable, but also reflective of the fact that we're not in those spaces reserved strictly for teaching and learning. So, I'm wondering Susan what kind of interact. What you've noticed from dealing in dealing with your students, and the online teaching in this time virtually?

Susan Frawley: There's the equitable the equity question is looming very large, and so there's always been this question, especially with the synchronous classes in the Zoom meetings on whether or not students need to show their faces and that this brought up the fact that, like you said that maybe they don't have quiet spaces in their new place where they're having to, you know, maybe, maybe they're in a home where they don't have their own room, or there's numerous people, they don't have a quiet space to do their work. I have one student who's a single mother of four. And she's in a small apartment with four children I was, I was actually talking to her today. And she has nowhere she has nowhere that she can be away from her children to have a quiet space and work. And then we also have issues with students who have lost their jobs. Students who have lost their homes. And so now at homeless students, you know, having issues with having equipment or having the internet or again, you know this equity of not wanting to show the space you're in because they might be sitting outside of a coffee shop. Using the only internet that's available to them. And so I've had a lot of students fall apart, and have a difficult time staying up with the semester, and then, you know, the thing is to they don't always tell you I just found out today here at the end of the semester about a student who was getting behind on her assignments, and she just told me today that she hasn't had internet for the last six weeks, and another one that lost her job and lost her computer and I'm like, she they just tell you no they have no and they either don't have a way to tell you, or they don't want to tell you because they're ashamed that they don't have the ability to do this. And so



it's been it's been a real struggle. It's been a real struggle for a number of students. And I think now that we're going to do this again in the fall. I think I'm going to be very clear. At the beginning of the semester that you know they can at least tell me what's going on so that I can help them get the services they need so that they can do well in the class.

Audrena Redmond: Do you find -- Susan, Vanessa -- that you are maybe spending more time with students trying to help them through this time period trying to understand where they are.? Is that true for you at all?

Vanessa Lopez-Littleton: early in the semester when we first transitioned I created this little handout for my colleagues on, you know, moving virtually and being equity minded. Because being in the classroom is one thing when a student is missing from your class, but now that we've moved virtually and, you know, as a student doesn't show up in a Zoom, or meeting or two, and coronavirus is out there, you don't know what's going on. And so I think our faculty have been showing a lot of compassion and care right now. And the calling and the emailing and the tracking of students to seem so you know I just seen such an intensification of that, where folks are actually reaching out to faculty, and you know when it department meetings were discussing, you know, where were these students and then what do we need to do, and then how do we get them plugged into resources. So I think we've seen just an escalation of that because we just don't know where people are and if they're safe, and so you know I applaud the faculty for their, you know, dedication to that. But one of the things that just stands in my head is, you know, we do this work, and we've made this shift. And it's this added pressure, this added stress. And, you know, and sometimes we feel like we're not being compensated or not supported in this in this regard. And so as we think about doing the same thing for the fall, you know, these campuses are just going to have to make sure that faculty are fully compensated for this work.

Audrena Redmond: And to be mindful I think of something that we and see if a cultural taxation, as that doesn't stop in this time period students have a relationship with you feel a level of comfort with you because of your personal identity so either you are a person of color, you are a woman. Your LGBTQIA plus faculty, you may be affected by a noticeable, or in it for a public disability and students who have those things or who see something in you will gravitate towards you and that will be the case, even with online learning when especially if they wants to raise your class. And so, we don't want to be mindful of that too but Vanessa you mentioned that there's a huge announcement today, which is that the Chancellor's Chancellor White has announced that most classes and this used to be offered online is which, you know, in the, in a in an emergency virtual learning experience, you know, you jump in and do what you have to do, but George, you know, what are some, what are some of the advice that you would give people in terms of best practices for preparing themselves for what will be a full semester of virtual learning?

George Station: Well, probably start with taking a fresh look at your learning outcomes, and how you might want to do things differently. Because what you did this spring was a crisis situation. And that



doesn't mean you necessarily want to replicate that or do most of those things again for the long term for a semester where you've got a little more time to plan. So, you'll want to find some guidance that I believe your local office of, you know force teaching and learning, or if it's an office of teaching excellence, but also your office. You've got a Center for Academic technologies with your instructional designers as well. So there are actually several avenues you have on campus. But even if you are active online and associate with colleagues online. There is no one single perfect right answer to it, except that. Be aware that everything is going to take a little bit longer. Online than maybe you think it's going to take in your regular face to face teaching. If you haven't taught online before, that's a big one. And then also, again back to those learning outcomes for your course. You may have institutional outcomes, or departmental or major learning outcomes that you're going to have to adhere to but within your course. Reconsider what those smaller course objectives are and how they might be better served in an online environment, you might want to just take a good hard look at those even if you know you're going to be keeping your overall learning outcomes.

Audrena Redmond: George Station, Susan Frawley, Vanessa Lopez-Littleton – thank you so much for being a part of this episode on Radio Free CSU. A very important discussion. Next time on Radio Free CSU, we'll be talking about more vulnerable CSU populations.

Until then.

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