

Our fiscal numbers in the state are not catastrophic; neither are they great. Our cases of COVID-19 are spiking in Utah—a state that previously effectively handled the pandemic. Yet, with a US presidential election and the necessarily charged atmosphere resulting from the Black Lives Matter protests, political science enrollments have already set a record for the fall. Political science is not an industry, it is a vocation. We must find ways to help these students navigate the political world that has proven to be far more important in shaping the response to this pandemic than anything else.

For department chairs who are handling this emergency situation going forward, I suggest the following six “good-enough” practices:

- If you are at a research institution (as I am), recognize that there is a bifurcation in research productivity happening throughout the academic world. Some scholars are not producing any research. I am a parent first, a department chair second, and a research scholar third. I am not getting any research done—at all. Yet, other faculty are using this new format as a quasi-sabbatical and accomplishing a lot. Some of this breaks down along gender lines (Weigand et al. 2020). Be sensitive to this and advocate for maximum flexibility for your research faculty regarding timelines for tenure and promotional reviews in the coming years.
- Although many colleagues appreciate the flexibility of the good-enough approach, others are perfectionists or prefer

The university has increasingly expanded the criteria for instructors who want to teach remotely while also being attentive to the importance of student preferences for in-person teaching. The latter shapes enrollments, important for the financial health of the university. All of this has only led to further uncertainty.

- People care most about their jobs, their health, and their families. Prioritize these when relaying the prospects for cuts or furloughs and for the provisions made by a university or your department in protecting the health (mental, emotional, and physical) and safety of instructors, graduate assistants, and staff. In turn, communicate that any obstacles regarding colleagues’ pay, job security, and health will be attended to immediately.
- Consider regular but not too frequent communications to all department instructors, teaching assistants, and staff. Resist the urge to appear “on top” of the situation with constant communication. Less frequent but detailed updates streamline and summarize the deluge of emails from central administration and also highlight other information that has been shared in town hall meetings between chairs and higher administration.
- Avoid the temptation to overdo contingency planning. There will be long-term drawbacks to the good-enough approach; that is, strategic plans will need to be postponed to a more certain time. However, our energy is being sapped daily and relentlessly by this dynamic situation. Even planning for “scenarios” in this fluid time is difficult and borderline quixotic. Furthermore, communicate this reality to higher-ups in your university administrative structure who otherwise consistently use strategic planning.
- Teaching evaluations will be haphazard. Flexible instructors likely will be rewarded for their understanding and empathetic approach to their students and classes. However, students who feel they are being “shorted” tuition value by the adjusted formats of online teaching during the pandemic may take it out on the instructors in their evaluations. Recognizing that your faculty members also are under pressure in various life roles (e.g., instructor, scholar, and parent), advocate for those who are using the good-enough approach in their teaching. Address how course evaluations should be used (or not) in their own assessments and reviews.

a more controlling, confident, and certain approach. I have witnessed this in some of my colleagues. They will be frustrated with this type of leadership, as some are with me. So be it. Doing good enough inevitably entails dealing with the disappointment and disapproval of colleagues. Some of us, however, do not need to be a perfect department chair. We just need to get by.

We remain in an emergency situation. The actor with agency, the one securitizing the entire situation, however, remains the virus. Until COVID-19 is resolved or defeated, I am not going to be perfect. I am going to be just good enough. ■

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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: WHAT CAN(T) WE RESEARCH ABOUT EMERGENCY E-LEARNING?

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The interventions in this spotlight draw attention to various ways that political science and international relations experienced the emergency e-learning transition in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. By way of conclusion, I turn to the questions still to be asked about pandemic pedagogy and what lessons it might hold for teaching and learning. Although

thought-provoking and productive for our present reality, the norm/exception logic embedded in analysis of pandemic pedagogy risks overemphasizing the emergency. In its least harmful form, attention to the emergency nostalgizes the norm³; at worst, overemphasis of deficiencies in the emergency crowd out space in which those in the normal condition might be expressed. The tightrope to be walked in researching pandemic pedagogy is that careful examination is necessary but may blind our analysis to important elements.

What Can We Research about Emergency e-Learning?

When looking to future directions in emergency e-learning research, several important avenues require exploration. Reflection on pedagogical practice is an important part of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) because it draws out the lessons learned from the perspective of the agents of change in the classroom. Simply stated, because the professor plans the course, sharing the professor's perspective can assist other professors in similar situations. However, this is only one way of "doing SoTL," and it captures only one particular qualitative form of empirical material. Many institutions are collecting student-experience surveys, which surely will provide new quantitative material to provide general insights into another perspective. However, a fuller understanding of emergency e-learning experiences will be possible only through systematic research combining approaches.

This type of in-depth analysis is particularly important to recognize barriers to access and other unequal experiences of emergency e-learning. Pre-pandemic, laptop ownership (Reisdorf, Triwibowo, and Yankelevich 2020) and technology maintenance and dependability (Gonzales, Calarco, and Lynch 2020) already pointed out how socioeconomic barriers lead to an unequal experience of postsecondary education. In the age of emergency e-learning, when laptops and dependable connections are not only necessary for assignments and reading but also for the course experience, the socioeconomic barrier increases. Racialized inequality in emergency e-learning is another important topic; previous e-learning researchers have found that—even beyond the economic digital divide—"access does not solve nor provide equitable learning conditions" on its own (Oztok 2020, 112). The extent to which emergency e-learning reproduces institutional and systemic racial inequalities merits careful attention.

Greater attention is necessary to understand how economically disadvantaged communities—as well as other populations with access and dependability issues including rural areas—experienced emergency e-learning and how supports might best be designed in preparation for future pandemics (or future waves of COVID-19).

The mental health impacts of COVID-19 and emergency e-learning are further important considerations for future research. Halladay et al. (2020) suggest that the quality of student-teacher relationships may support students' decisions to seek out mental health treatment, which would be especially important during the pandemic. Preliminary evidence suggests that postsecondary students faced higher levels of anxiety, stress, depression, and substance use during COVID-19 (Charles et al. 2020). However, the emergency e-learning environment—even in a synchronous format—is a less-personal connection than face-to-

face instruction. The combination of increased mental health symptoms with less classroom contact is an important consideration for pedagogical planning.

Finally, institutional responses to COVID-19 emergency e-learning have proceeded largely on an institution-by-institution basis, and the effectiveness of this policy-making strategy requires attention that political science and international relations may be uniquely able to provide. In contrast with the collaborative response to Hurricane Katrina—in which the so-called Sloan Semester brought many institutions together to offer a catalog of online courses to affected students (Tarantelli 2008)—emergency e-learning responses to COVID-19 occurred largely on an institution-by-institution or system-by-system basis.

What Can't We Research about Emergency e-Learning?

Increasing the attention to the exceptionality of emergency e-learning, however, comes at a cost. Examining the deficiencies, inequalities, and barriers of emergency e-learning as exceptional experiences obscures the deficiencies, inequalities, and barriers that exist in the normal arrangements of educational systems (Murphy 2020, 502). Despite specific attention being warranted to this exceptional experience of emergency e-learning, it is important that its difference from the normal condition not be overstated. The digital divide, racial inequality, policy coordination, and other issues are not limited to the case of COVID-19 responses. It is our hope that this spotlight's presentation of various perspectives will provide insights as professors and administrators prepare for an uncertain future of COVID-19. We also hope that it sparks a broader conversation and research project into the politics of the classroom, in both exceptional and normal times. ■


NOTE


1. I thank Heather Smith for pointing out this tendency at the Women in International Security—Toronto Twitter Conference.


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