

Things to Consider While Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Teaching during these unprecedented times can be difficult. Both educators and students are under unusually high amounts of stress, and many are having to deal with unexpected, and often traumatic, life events. This document provides some suggestions to help you navigate these difficult times.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEMESTER

- 1 Become aware of UT's [classroom](#) and [instructional lab](#) health and safety policies:**
Teaching and learning in a face-to-face environment has changed dramatically over the past year. It is important to keep yourself, and your students, as safe as possible while in class.
- 2 Devote some class time to acknowledging the challenges associated with the pandemic and answering questions about changes in classroom or UT policies:**
Many students feel confused and anxious during the first week of classes. These feelings are exacerbated by the current pandemic. Spending some time letting your learners know the new rules will help ease tensions and avoid misunderstandings down the road.
- 3 Create a seating chart:**
Due to contact tracing, the Provost's Office is requiring that educators create [a seating chart](#) for each of their classes.
- 4 Consider including a "mental health day" for the entire class or a "mental health day pass" for your students:**
Scheduling a day for your students to catch up and relax, or allowing them to choose the day they need a break, will help reduce stress levels.
- 5 Prepare for stress:**
Everyone experiences and expresses stress differently, and some students may express it in disruptive ways. The Crisis Prevention Institute provides [a list of ten steps](#) to take to de-escalate tense situations.
- 6 Create a plan for group work:**
Group work can be challenging with social distancing guidelines; therefore, creating a plan at the beginning of the semester will help group projects go more smoothly. You can review [Active Learning in the Physically-Distanced Classroom](#) and [Four Group Activities](#) for ideas on how to adapt your group work projects to health and safety policies.

THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER

- 1 Be available for questions:**
Throughout the semester, policies may change, students may encounter unprecedented vents, and some may simply need clarification on new policies. It is important to let your students know that you are available for questions throughout the semester.
- 2 Model the required mitigation behavior, such as wearing masks, while on campus:**
Students are more likely to follow the policies if they see the behaviors modeled by faculty and staff.

- 3 Increase your “stage presence” during lectures:**

Social distancing and health and safety requirements can make the classroom seem cold and dehumanizing. To counter this, you can increase the amount of eye contact you make while lecturing to establish a rapport with your students. Also, using more exaggerated physical and verbal cues will help students understand you better since they can't see you whole face.
- 4 Be flexible:**

Keep in mind that students may be asked to move to different dorms or self-quarantine and may have to miss class. When appropriate, be forgiving of absences and work missed during the times students were unable to attend class.
- 5 Request informal feedback on your teaching:**

Many educators are using new teaching practices due to the new policies and restrictions that are now in place. Asking the students to fill out a quick, anonymous survey about how they feel the class is going can help you adjust your teaching as needed.
- 6 Conduct check-ins at the beginning of each class:**

Taking a few moments out of each class to allow your students to talk with one another about how they are coping with these new challenges builds a sense of community within your classroom and lets your students know that they are not alone.
- 7 Consider assigning portions of larger classroom activities as “pre-class” work:**

With social distancing, safety guidelines, and increased stress, class activities will take longer than they did pre-pandemic. Assigning portions of larger activities as pre-class work, or scaling down larger activities, will help students complete the activity by the end of class.
- 8 Stay updated about UT’s COVID-19 status:**

UT’s [COVID-19 website](#) has information about campus operations and teaching assignments. Also, the Chancellor’s Office is offering [updates](#) on the situation.
- 9 Respond effectively to class related situations:**
 - In the event that students do not comply with safety measures, the Provost’s office asks that instructors give students the benefit of the doubt and allow them to change their approach or leave the classroom to retrieve protective equipment. If students repeatedly arrive at class without appropriate protective equipment, instructors are advised to [file a report with SCCS](#).
 - The Provost’s Office also has links explaining [what happens when a COVID-19 case is reported](#), and [what instructors should do if they feel sick](#).
 - The Academic Success Center has provided a guide to [Recognizing a Disengaged Scholar](#), to help instructors catch student difficulties early.
- 10 Take Care of Yourself:**

Don’t forget to monitor your own stress level! The College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences has made available [Resources and Support](#) for managing health, caregiving, teaching at home, and living and working in an online context. Additionally, Human Resources has also offered a downloadable [Personal and Professional Resources PDF](#) with information about childcare, elder care, and other support options.