

PEDAGOGY IN A PANDEMIC

BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING ONLINE DURING COVID-19

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So, you've learned Webex. Now what?

The Office of Digital Learning has compiled three suggestions for effective theological education during this crisis. We hope these ideas can inspire meaningful teaching and learning now that you've done the challenging work of transitioning online.

#1 PRIORITIZE CONNECTION

Right now, students may be feeling particularly unmotivated if what you are teaching seems abstract or disconnected from their lived experiences during this pandemic. By connecting your teaching to what they are experiencing, you will deepen the learning that takes place.

Here's what one PTS faculty member said about how they're doing this:

"In today's class it was clear that many--especially those with children--are highly anxious. We tried to channel that anxiety--and the class's broad level of concern for what's happening in the world--directly into our discussion... if they were going to take time away from their families under these circumstances of global crisis, the class by golly had better be worth it. It had better be relevant to the crisis they/we are all experiencing. I found this to be very profound and instructive for seminary education in general. I will try to carry that sense of urgency and relevance into the other class as well, to try and generate more investment on the students' part."

Draw upon what's going on in the world and in students' lives right now and integrate that into your teaching. The best learning takes place when students are motivated and when content seems relevant to their lives.



For more, [click here](#) to read an article by Craig E. Abrahamson, a Professor of Psychology at James Madison University, about motivating student learning through personal connection.

#2 CHOOSE LEARNING OVER CONTENT TYRANNY

Content tyranny is what happens when you prioritize your content over student learning, when you become more focused on covering material than on cultivating growth. Your content is valuable, and you are most likely passionate about it. However, by letting go of some of your content, you may free up your students to learn *better*. If the current situation has forced you to drop some course content, let this reassure you. More content does not necessarily lead to more learning. Rather, students will learn better when you select your content carefully, deliver your content thoughtfully, and connect your content intentionally to their lived experiences.

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For more, [click here](#) to read an article by John G. Radzilowicz and Michelle B. Colvin from the University of Pittsburgh about reducing course content without compromising quality.

#3 EMBRACE A CREATIVE SPIRIT

You are all already doing this! The best teaching is a mix between science and art, and in times like these pedagogy feels more like artistic expression. Each online class session is a practice in improvisation while teaching. Any number of difficulties might arise, but you can handle these with confidence and grace if you embrace a flexible and creative spirit. As a theological institution with Reformed heritage, we also trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in the teaching and learning endeavor and in your creative improvisation. Even if technology fails and your words seem jumbled, we trust that the Holy Spirit is at work.



For more, [click here](#) to read an address by Emilie Townes, the Dean of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, about teaching and the imagination.

Taking your classes online with a week's notice is no small task. Thank you for your hard work, perseverance, and commitment to teaching. Please let us know how we can continue to support you. Email digital.learning@ptsem.edu as your technical questions come up or to talk through how to integrate some of these suggestions as you head into your final few weeks of the spring semester.



About the author: Kelsey Lambright is the Digital Learning Designer at Princeton Theological Seminary. She is also a PhD candidate at PTS pursuing a degree in Practical Theology in the area of Christian Education and Formation. When she's not knee-deep in new digital learning designs or dissertation work, you might be able to find her reading a fantasy book outside in her hammock, traveling the world (plans in the works for post-pandemic!), or social distancing with her husband and kitten at home while playing video games.