

Question 8:
How do you shift your teaching practices to navigate disruptive change?

“The “how” is difficult to answer. Allow me to begin with the “why.” It is imperative that teachers modify their teaching practices during turbulent times – for reasons that emerge from our field’s rhetorical roots. In a sense, the classroom presents a rhetorical situation in which our goal is to facilitate learning with our students. Disruptive changes create new exigencies in that rhetorical situation.

That brings us from the “why” to the “how.” Changing situations require that we adapt our efforts to help students learn, but the “how” might differ depending on the nature of the new exigencies. In any case, teachers would be well served to regard teaching as a process of lifelong learning. We should constantly work to add to our pedagogical toolkits. The broader our skillsets, the better prepared we will be to address unforeseen exigencies.”

Michael Irvin Arrington, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Sam Houston State University
2013 John I. Sisco Excellence in Teaching Award, Southern States Communication Association

“Coming out on the other side of a pandemic offered great insight for permanent changes to the way that I teach. It’s forced me to rethink the utility of deadlines, and my former practice of every assignment being docked for being late. I think learning about trauma-informed pedagogy made me realize that I was taking myself too seriously as a professor. While my personality thrives on structure, deadlines, and rubrics, I have learned that I may be in a minority of people who share that perspective in my own classroom in a given semester. Disruptive change is, obviously, disruptive; offering students guidelines, support, flexibility, and paths *through* that disruption seems both humane and also personally fulfilling.”

Jonathan M. Bowman
2014 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education
2014 Western States Communication Association’s Distinguished Teaching Award

"This past year I have tried two approaches that have worked well. First, I tried letting a graduate class build its own syllabus and identify what they wanted to gain from the course. That included letting them think about what the options for a final project look like, giving them a lot of control about what information was taught in the course, and setting up expectations for what they wanted out of the class and each other. Although this approach cannot work for every class one teaches, I highly encourage teachers who are looking for ways to empower their students to research and try this method. I found that by doing so, the class became more inclusive of diverse student needs; was taken more seriously by the students who were both getting the lessons/knowledge they craved and who also understood why learning certain topics or exploring particular theories was important to others; and overall created a space where students were vulnerable both in terms of the personal information they shared and in admitting what they

did not know and hoped to understand better. I am eager to try this approach again this coming academic year, but this time with an undergraduate course.

The other approach I tried was creating grading contracts with undergraduate students. A grading contract allows students to individually collaborate with the teacher to refine their particular goals or needs from the course and to do an agreed upon set of assignments that they eventually have an opportunity to provide their own assessment and reflection on in addition to the instructor. In other words, students can draw from a course's learning objectives to both contribute to the curriculum and to help determine how they will ultimately be evaluated in the course. Both the student and the teacher agree on the final contract.

Again, this approach takes time – but, based on my first time offering this approach to students, the time put in at the beginning was more than made up for later when students gave more attention to their studies and turned in high quality work. Those interested in learning more about this research-supported practice—including how it transforms defeatist attitudes about classroom learning, eliminates racist and classist knowledge practices, and increases student engagement—should read the edited collection *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)* by Susan D. Blum to learn more."

Jimmie Manning

Professor and Chair, Communication Studies

University of Nevada, Reno

2020 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education
