Supporting Students in a Remote Learning Environment

With UNH transitioned to remote instruction in response to the COVID-19, faculty teaching in this new environment may have questions about how to recognize students of concern. Depending on the nature of the course, the number of students enrolled, and the extent of contact faculty had with students in their physical classroom, recognizing students of concern may not be markedly different. Here is some information to help guide faculty in determining when students may need extra attention or a referral to campus resources.

Currently, PACS is open 9am to 4pm onsite in Smith Hall to offer crisis consultation for urgent and mental health emergencies during our business hours. If you are not on campus or it is after hours, please know that there are other resources available to you. You may access a trained counselor 24/7 through the Crisis Text line by texting “HOME” to 741741. You can also speak with a trained crisis counselor by calling 800-273-8255. If you are experiencing a life threatening emergency, please call 911 or visit your local emergency room. For additional crisis resources, click: https://www.unh.edu/pacs/crisis-emergency-services

How should I expect my students to adjust to remote instruction when coming from the classroom environment?

This will depend on many factors. Some students have had online classes before, so for them, the adjustment to remote learning may not be significant. Still, this environment is different, so we can expect students to be initially overwhelmed with moving all of their instruction online and then having to adjust to different instructional styles. Expect students to struggle initially with logging into class on time, working the technology, and learning how to meet your expectations now that instruction has moved entirely online.

Encourage students to find or create a conducive space to get started. For some it may be their bedrooms and for others, basements or various areas of their home. Ask that they try and reconfigure a sense of structure to their day which might mean allocating their former class time for designated work time for that class. It could also require a review of strategies that were previously effective and finding ways to implement them. Encouraging students to find outlets to break up their days and simulate the distractions normally found i.e. utilizing various spaces in their home such as kitchen for meals, work space for work, other areas for research, reading, notes, etc. Know that there will be a vast array of challenges being presented by each student. There are some space concerns that cannot be controlled for so looking at timing and creative alternate options is the best support you can offer.

Asynchronous teaching can provide some synchronous opportunities and certain students will fare better with one format over another. Synchronous learning platforms can give students and instructors a sense of human contact. At the same time, faculty should be wary of giving too much leeway in the form of open-ended or less-than-rigorous assignments. It is important to be able to understand students’ different situations and recognize that you as an instructor have some flexibility within the structure, but at the same time, hold students accountable for the required work.
How should I address students’ concerns with assignments, exams, papers, and the challenges of working in an all-online environment?

Be patient with your students, and with yourself. Expect technology glitches and problems, so you aren’t surprised by them. Empathize with students’ frustrations while also providing reassurance that we are all learning together and will get better as time goes on. Be reasonable with your expectations. Also helpful is to encourage students to maintain balance in their lives: computers and devices have been a big part of their recreational life and with online learning, technology can take over. Spending the day staring at a computer screen or notes is typically not the most stimulating way of learning or retaining material. Some examples are to keep in touch with family and friends, using technology for connection. Exercising regularly including walking, running, yoga, home equipment, or virtual fitness classes will also help with stress, anxiety and depression. Frame to students that quarantine can be an opportunity to explore activities they never usually have time for such as board games, crafting, writing, drawing, and leisure reading.

What if a student demonstrates more adjustment problems than I might expect?

This is a crucial concern. If, particularly after an initial period of adjustment, a student seems overly frustrated, overwhelmed, or distressed, take note. Students may have been focused on getting up and running virtually and now are dealing with grief over a lost semester and that goes with it, grief related to the death of a loved one from COVID-19, extended quarantine, and anxiety related to an uncertain future. Encourage the student to speak with you during online office hours, or seek assistance from other campus resources to resolve technology concerns or frustrations with the online environment. If concerns appear to be more personal in nature (i.e., difficulty setting up an appropriate learning environment from home, personal and financial struggles), suggest the student check in with CFAR (https://www.unh.edu/cfar) or PACS (https://www.unh.edu/pacs/).

Are support services available to students in the remote learning environment?

All UNH student support services are providing services to students remotely.

If a student demonstrates inappropriate classroom behavior during an online learning session, what are my options?

Reach out to the student first and invite them to meet with you during online office hours. Talk with them to try to uncover the issues possibly behind the behaviors so you can have a better idea of an appropriate referral. Give the student direct feedback about the behavior, not only how it is disruptive to the class but also how it impacts their own ability to be successful. If this is not productive and/or the behavior is more egregious, please report to the Dean of Students Ted Kirkpatrick, who has retained on campus presence and can be reached at 603-862-2053 or Ted.Kirkpatrick@unh.edu. In addition, bias-related incidents may be reported by using the following Bias Incident Response Form.
Disruptive behavior that does not meet the threshold of being bias-related but is a possible violation of student conduct may be reported to Community Standards Office (https://www.unh.edu/ocs)

How is recognizing a student of concern different in an online environment?

In many respects, the same behaviors that concern you in a classroom environment continue to be concerning when learning remotely. Be particularly attuned to changes in behavior during this transition. Is a typically highly engaged student now seemingly disengaged? Are assignments late? Maybe the student has stopped showing up for instruction and is not attempting to engage you during office hours. Do they seem overly tired and now not interested in the course material? All of these changes may suggest that concerns are present or may be looming.

What student behaviors are most concerning, and may warrant an immediate referral to the Dean of Students?

Increasingly withdrawn behaviors, expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness, loss of interest in previously important activities, drop in academic performance, abrupt changes in mood, indications of increased aggressiveness, and talk (even in a seemingly joking manner) of harming oneself could all be indicators of deeper, more serious concerns. The more behaviors present, the greater the risk to the student. If you have concerns, particularly if the student is unresponsive to outreach attempts from you, please call to consult with the clinician on call at PACS (602-862-2090) or Dean of Students (603-862-2053).

What if a student is concerned about their health or the health of those they are currently living with?

Faculty can refer students to the UNH Homepage on COVID-19 resources website for guidelines as well as recommend that a student contact their medical provider. In addition, students can also seek information and guidance at UNH Health & Wellness by calling the UNH COVID-19 hotline at 603-123-4567.