

The Mother of Learning Innovation

COVID HAS TAUGHT ME HOW TO BETTER LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO MAINTAIN LEARNING FLOW—BOTH VIRTUALLY AND PHYSICALLY. **BY TONY O'DRISCOLL**

According to the World Economic Forum, during the last year, more than 1.2 billion children were required to move from their classroom to their living room or bedroom to continue their studies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At Duke University, COVID's impact was no less disruptive. Over a three-week break period, our faculty worked around the clock to convert 6,000 courses from classroom to virtual format. On March 23, 2020, 8,500 students logged on virtually and collectively spent 4,753 hours online.

At the Fuqua School of Business, we remained in virtual mode for the next 444 days. Throughout that time, our faculty leveraged every technological affordance at their disposal to improve the virtual learning experience for their students.

The necessity to move to an online format was the mother of a huge wave of learning innovation. Best practices and new technical features and functionality were rapidly shared and applied. My own framing of the COVID disruption migrated from *"How do I use this technology to recreate the classroom experience for my students?"* to *"How can I leverage the technology to reinvent the learning experience for students?"*

As a result, I developed a whole new set of heuristics around how to stage and sequence learning nuggets

to maintain a state of flow that balances challenge and boredom for students. I frequently use virtual pop quizzes, spot polls, and backchannel chat blasts to keep students engaged within that learning flow. I also integrate simulations and games into the learning flow, and I use virtual whiteboarding platforms to structure and guide asynchronous teamwork.

BACK TO SCHOOL

On June 10, 2021, I re-entered the physical classroom at Fuqua. It was an eerie feeling to be back in front of students in "meatspace" (i.e., the world outside the 'Net). I must admit there were times I found myself wishing I could fire up one of my digital learning nuggets to keep the flow going as I sensed the energy wane.

In reframing the challenge of applying technology to reinvent the learning experience for students rather than just applying it to recreate the classroom experience, my approach to teaching has been forever changed. And I firmly believe my students' learning experience will be all the better for it.

Winston Churchill famously quipped, *"Never let a good crisis go to waste."* COVID has taught me how to better leverage technology to maintain learning flow. I will not let that lesson go to waste as we migrate back into the classroom this fall. 🇺🇸



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