



Lived Experiences of College Faculty Administrators Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study documents the responses taken by the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), University of the Philippines (UP) Manila during the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing the phenomenological approach, this study narrates the authors' experiences as administrators and faculty members as they responded to the challenges of disruption caused by the pandemic, such as the delivery of Course Packs, digitization of materials, the use of Learning Management Systems, faculty online workshops on remote teaching, and the shift to online transactions. It shows some mechanisms that could be adopted by schools in implementing innovative solutions and strategies to improve the quality of education in the post-pandemic era while some could even be adopted as we shifted to blended learning, bearing in mind the various contexts of our students under the New Normal. The pandemic taught us that these learning tools do not necessarily supplant, but rather supplement, classroom-based instruction.

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Introduction

In 2020, the world experienced an unexpected outbreak of an infectious disease, caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). First reported in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, the disease, which was eventually called COVID-19, spread rapidly around the world, and was officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020.

Consequently, quarantines, lockdowns, and curfews were implemented in most countries to contain the spread of the virus. In the Philippines, the entire Metro Manila region was ordered to go under lockdown by then-President Rodrigo Duterte from March 15 to April 14, 2020. Most establishments were ordered to close, with only businesses offering essential needs such as food and medicines allowed to operate. Despite the alarm and confusion triggered by the announcement, many believed that the lockdown would be limited to the declared quarantine period and that things would normalize in a month. However, as we all experienced, community quarantines of various severities were in effect for the better part of two years. On May 5, 2023, the WHO declared that COVID-19 no longer represents a “global health emergency” (Mundasad & Roxby, 2023).

The implementation of lockdowns across the globe had a tremendous impact on crucial aspects of daily life. Educational institutions were among the most heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Face-to-face instruction - the norm in Philippine education - was very abruptly made unavailable and inaccessible at all levels of the educational system, forcing institutions to develop complex and innovative responses very rapidly. Higher education institutions such as the University of the Philippines (UP) Manila strove to find ways to continue the learning process without compromising the safety and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. At the same time, as part of the premier state university system, we also had to contend with being able to continue delivering the institution’s other goals, such as conducting research and providing meaningful service to Philippine society.

Several studies analyzing how the Philippine Higher Education system experienced and responded to the challenge of providing alternative education and learning services during the pandemic have been published (Cuaton, 2020; Gayeta, 2020; Joaquin et al., 2020; Maboloc, 2021). Some studies analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students’ well-being (Asiones, 2023; Barrot et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2022;), whereas others reported on the distinct experiences of educational institutions during the pandemic. For instance, Tuga et al. (2021) analyzed the effect of COVID-19 in the Philippine Normal University (PNU) and how they addressed the challenges toward a new normal in education. Tumamao-Guittap et al. (2022) shared a glimpse of teacher’s capability for distance learning focusing on the case of the School of Urban and Regional Planning in UP Diliman; while Mariano (2022) talked about the experiences of Centro Escolar University in Manila amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

In light of the growing literature on higher educational institutions’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, the experiences of most, if not all, educational institutions in the country must be properly documented, to assess the effectiveness of various approaches used, and to determine which aspects of the pandemic - induced remote instruction model may continue to be utilized, as we transition towards the new normal in education. While the impact of the pandemic on education is universal, institutional narratives differ, as these are affected by many factors, for example, the student and faculty profile, as well as resource availability. Thus, the phenomenological approach used in this study provides a more nuanced

portrait of the lived experiences of the authors as administrators and faculty members who experienced the challenges faced during the pandemic. Recommendations presented in this study may also inform educational leaders of innovative solutions and strategies to improve the quality of education in the long run.

This paper documents how the College of Arts and Sciences at UP Manila adapted to the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it reports the college's experiences during this unexpected and abrupt disruption through the eyes of faculty administrators who had to implement the directives from the UP Manila administration at the level of the College, while witnessing first-hand how these directives affected the college faculty, students, and staff.

Methodology

Research Design

This study focuses on the lived experiences of the authors as faculty administrators of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) of UP Manila. Hence, it uses the hermeneutic phenomenological method. We shall briefly explain what phenomenology, hermeneutics, and hermeneutic phenomenological methods are. Then we justify the use of the hermeneutic phenomenological method for this study.

Phenomenology is known as the study of phenomena, wherein anything that appears in the consciousness is called a phenomenon. As a method, Husserl made use of phenomenology to invite researchers to suspend judgments about certain experiences, and instead focus on describing the experiences as they appear in consciousness. Ultimately, these unbiased descriptions will allow the researchers to extract the essence of human experiences. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, is known as the art of interpretation. Heidegger, Husserl's student, developed a new approach to phenomenology, wherein the study of lived experiences is no longer treated as objects to be reduced to their essence. Instead, Heidegger suggests that interpretation is the meaning of phenomenological description. This is in view of his notion that human beings are always situated in a context, and this context will impose its meaning on the one having an experience. Hence, in Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology, there can never be any objective or detached approach to dealing with human experiences (Gill, 2020).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a method that balances the descriptive aspect of phenomenology, and the interpretive aspect of hermeneutics. Experiences are described as lived experiences but must be understood as an interpretation of subjects who are situated in a context. This method fits the objective of this study, which is to show how CAS UP Manila responded to the phenomenon of COVID-19. The lived experiences of the authors play an important part in this study since they are faculty administrators of the college. This means

that they are affected by the pandemic both as educators and administrators of the CAS of UP Manila, which is part of the University of the Philippines System. Hence, it is inevitable that their responses and direction were limited by the guidelines and policies coming from the system. This limitation is part of the hermeneutic understanding of the experiences of the authors. Consequently, memos, email correspondence, and personal reflections in this study are necessary (Ramsook, 2018). However, the context of the authors as faculty administrators of CAS UPM is not the only factor that must be considered when they deal with the challenges of the pandemic. It must be understood that their contexts as individuals (as a mother, daughter, son, sibling, friend, and all the other aspects of their situation) also affected the way they responded to the challenges of the pandemic. While the idea of the researcher as a participant in phenomenology is somewhat new, the researcher's experiences may be utilized to provide an ample picture of the phenomenon being investigated by examining how data from researchers experiencing the phenomenon of interest could be used to elucidate conjectures and inferences (Johnston et al., 2016).

Lastly, the hermeneutic phenomenological method also serves as the framework for this study as it seeks to analyze and understand the different narratives of the lived experiences of the phenomenon. This means that the focus here is the interpretation of the experiences rather than the mere description of experiences. "Phenomenology as a methodological framework has evolved into a process that seeks reality in individuals' narratives of their lived experiences of phenomena... hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes interpretation as opposed to just description" (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015, p.2). Phenomenology then serves as both method and framework in this study.

Participants of the Study

In this study, we provide narratives on the lived experiences of the authors as faculty administrators of the CAS by showing how the CAS at the UPM, the UP System's Health Sciences Center, responded to the disruption caused by the pandemic. As a background, the CAS is one of nine degree-granting units of UP Manila. Composed of six departments namely the Department of Arts and Communication (DAC), the Department of Biology (DB), the Department of Behavioral Sciences (DBS), the Department of Physical Education (DPE), the Department of Physical Sciences and Mathematics (DPSM), and the Department of Social Sciences (DSS), it offers ten undergraduate program courses as well as four master's degrees, with the vision of being the transformational leader in health-oriented education, research, and public service in the humanities and the sciences (College of Arts and Sciences, n.d.). Aside from educating its undergraduate students and graduate students, CAS also provides quality liberal education to all students at the University by offering General Education (GE) as well as foundational courses in the fields of arts, humanities, sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and physical education.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study mostly relied on memos, email correspondences, accomplishment reports, and personal reflections of the authors as faculty administrators. Thus, steps undertaken in our data analysis include familiarization with the texts we have gathered, classifying them according to themes (course pack, LMS, etc.), identifying patterns by engaging in interactive discussion sessions, and then arriving at a consensus by having our reflections/interpretations validated by one another. The personal knowledge and experiences of the authors form the basis for this study, supported by written materials relevant to the subject being studied. As a phenomenological study, reflection is the leading method of analysis used as the authors try to make sense of the different lived experiences of the phenomenon and come up with an interpretation and possible resolutions to these experiences.

Results and Discussion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, education systems all over the world were compelled to transition to remote learning, and the CAS at UPM was no exception. Because of the very unexpected turn of events, classes for the rest of the 2nd semester of the Academic Year (AY) 2019 - 2020 had to be canceled. Faculty members were enjoined to show utmost compassion to students, many of whom faced personal challenges, while administrators strategized on how to deal with disruptions in the educational landscape. Following the mandate of the UP System, the CAS implemented the following changes to ensure the continuation of our student's education during the pandemic: dissemination of Course Packs (CPs), digitization of learning materials, use of learning management systems, faculty support, shift to online transactions, and showing compassion and flexibility to affected students.

The University of the Philippines (UP) had already been planning how UP students could continue their learning despite class suspensions brought about by natural hazards, disasters, or social/political events even before the COVID-19 pandemic happened. The plan includes fast-tracking the shift to lifelong learning as well as changes in pedagogies and assessment to include a mix of in-person, online, and experiential coursework; and making course packs available at the start of every semester to promote independent learning. Thus, it seemed the global spread of the pandemic merely hastened the initial plan of transforming higher education from traditional teaching and learning to one that suits the needs of the “new normal” in education (OVPAA Memorandum No. 2020-68, 2020).

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University, like the rest of educational institutions across the world, opted to prioritize the safety of its constituents by adopting remote learning, with the blending of remote and face-to-face learning for Academic Year (AY) 2020-2021 if the public health situation allows. This was done via synchronous (real-time communication between teachers and learners via online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet) and asynchronous (non-real-time communication between teachers and learners)

using a uniform LMS. Adjustments were also made concerning the Academic Calendar by shortening the first and second semesters to 14 weeks (Adoption of 14-Week Semester for AY 2020-2021, 2020), asserting that the reduction in the number of weeks in the semester will not affect the delivery of content since lessons will be delivered asynchronously or synchronously. To make sure that the required physical infrastructure for remote learning will be available, the University implemented certain mechanisms such as maintaining its institutional subscription to Zoom for online activities and providing support for Internet connectivity and subsidies to faculty and staff, as well as the adoption of alternative work arrangements (AWA) for the administrative staff and REPS (Research, Extension and Professional Staff) (Memorandum No. TJH 2020-30, 2020; Memorandum No. TJH 2021-03, 2021). A survey for faculty members and REPS who wished to avail of a zero-interest computer loan program to purchase a new computer or to upgrade their existing computers was also conducted (OVCAA Memorandum No. 2020-83, 2020) and loan packages were made available to those who signified interest.

As part of the preparations for remote learning, academic units were also enjoined to review their curriculum to determine alternative possible sequencing of courses to be offered in the First and Second Semester AY 2020-2021 and Midyear, taking into account important considerations such as which courses can be entirely delivered remotely and which can be offered in the First Semester, and which courses required a face-to-face component and can be delivered in a blended mode, among others, after which academic units were enjoined to redesign courses based on the reviewed curriculum and come up with CPs to be made available to students by September 1, 2020 (OVCAA Memorandum on Program and Course Redesign Template, 2020).

Delivery/Dissemination of Course Packs

Following the lead of the UPM administration while also traversing the situation based on its own needs and contexts, CAS planned the design and execution of remote learning strategies. Faculty members were instructed to prepare CPs for the subjects they will teach. CPs contain essential teaching-learning materials that served as a course guide and roadmap to both faculty and students as they navigated the shortened 14-week semester through remote learning mode, starting the First Semester of AY 2020-2021. CPs served as the expected output for all courses offered in the First Semester of 2020-2021 (OVCAA Memorandum No. 2020-68A, 2020).

CPs were delivered in the form of printed materials or stored in digital form in USBs for those students without any internet connectivity/TELCO signal/those with poor and/or unreliable internet connectivity/those who experience frequent power interruptions in their places of residence/those who do not have gadgets to use for online instruction or disseminated via online LMS. To assess who among the students needed to have the physical copies of the CPs sent to them, CAS departments were tasked to conduct targeted surveys of their students during the pre-enlistment/registration period while the faculty-in-charge was instructed to verify this information on the first day of synchronous classes. To compensate for the time, effort, and resources of faculty members who prepared the CPs during the Teacher's Leave

in June-July, CP incentives were given for every complete CP prepared for a 3-unit course, pro-rated among faculty involved in the preparation (OVPAAMemorandum 2021-118, 2021).

Because CPs had to be made available to students before the start of the 1st semester of 2020 - 2021, preparations had to be done within a tight timeline. This proved to be challenging for some faculty members, especially those who had team-taught courses, for these had to be coordinated among the teaching faculty. Delivery of physical copies also proved to be costly, especially those that contained voluminous materials, as these had to be delivered via courier.

Digitization of Learning Materials

In the transition to remote learning, one important need addressed was the availability of digitized materials, especially the references used by faculty and students in their respective courses. In March 2020, a Library Survival Kit was made available by the CAS library for the library needs of students and faculty members that included instructions and links for off-campus access, installation of a Virtual Private Network (VPN) from the student's laptop/desktop computer to remotely access online resources; list of online resources including active subscriptions and free trial databases; the CAS library's online platforms (website and FB page); one-stop access for all library resources and services available in UP Manila through the University Library website; and ask-a-librarian mechanism via email or Facebook for questions and concerns on library services (E. Delgado, personal communication, March 17, 2020).

This endeavor, together with the faculty member's personal initiatives in digitizing their materials, made it possible for the students to continue their education in a remote setup without compromising the required learning outcomes. Links to the reading materials were already incorporated in the CPs to make it easier for the students to access class materials online. The process also provided faculty members the opportunity to digitize their teaching materials which had already been planned even before the pandemic.

For faculty members like us, digitizing our resources while preparing CPs was a daunting task, especially since not all of us have scanners at home and computer/printing shops were closed during the pandemic. Supplementing the College Library's initiatives were personal efforts of faculty members who had to rely on their resourcefulness to comply with the required CPs.

Use of Learning Management Systems

The use of LMS was a necessity in the shift to remote instruction. LMS refers to software that provides the framework that handles all aspects of the learning process where we can house, deliver, and track our educational content (Kirvan, n.d.). Faculty members in the CAS were enjoined to use text-based (basic email, FB messenger, Viber group) as well as online

discussion boards in various platforms, LMS such as UP's UVLE (or University Virtual Learning Environment which allows UP teachers to design online learning spaces), Canvas, Edmodo, and Google Classroom, among others. These LMS allow professors to post grades, information, and assignments and, at the same time allow students to submit their course requirements/assignments online. For synchronous activities such as lectures, webinars, and teleconferences, online platforms such as Zoom and/or Google Meet were used. While remote learning has been commonly perceived as inferior to face-to-face learning in terms of quality, it is believed that it has the potential to offer the same quality provided there is guided independent study that is properly planned and implemented (OVPAAM Memorandum No. 2020-68, 2020).

Laboratory classes also had to rapidly transition to online modes of learning. For example, Chemistry and Biochemistry laboratory professors developed and designed virtual laboratory experiments, which simulated how actual experiments were conducted in the laboratory. Some even produced their own YouTube videos that demonstrated specific experiments. Several useful applications were also made available to the University, such as Labster, which allowed students to interact virtually with laboratory equipment and perform experiments, and the Journal of Visualized Experiments, or JoVe, an online publisher of video resources, including those for teaching laboratory fundamentals. Laboratory classes are now back to 100% face-to-face mode. However, these online resources have been integrated into the curriculum as supplemental resources that students may access anytime.

The sudden shift to various LMS was not easy, especially for faculty members who do not consider themselves tech-savvy. Suddenly we had to use Zoom or Google Meet for the first time, and although the College conducted some online training for the use of these platforms, not everybody was able to attend those trainings. It was a challenge, especially for households composed of family members who had to use the internet all at the same time. Space was also identified as one of the challenges, not to mention students and faculty who had limited or no internet connectivity at all.

Faculty Support

To equip the faculty with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement the delivery of educational content online, mechanisms were employed such as the conduct of how-to videos for faculty in the shift to online instruction. Faculty workshops and conferences were also geared towards this end, with the CAS Faculty Conferences (held online) focusing on sharing experiences from a semester of course packs and remote instruction; and enhancing online teaching skills through utilizing various technologies used in remote instruction, respectively. Online instruction tools were also disseminated to the faculty while some were encouraged to invite online guest lecturers who are experts in their fields, from the Philippines or from abroad, as a means of enriching learning content/strategy. The CAS Committee on Online Instruction (later renamed CAS Committee on Instruction when the learning mode shifted to blended learning) under the CAS Office of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (OADAA)

has been instrumental in planning and implementing online faculty conferences and workshops since the pandemic, on various topics such as enhancing online teaching skills, experiences from a semester of course packs and remote instruction, online training series on Turnitin, Canva, Edpuzzle, Slido, Student Learning Assessment and Quizzes & Surveys on Canvas, Blended Learning, education under the New Normal, and safeguarding the faculty's mental health. These activities, while done remotely, provided the necessary skills and avenues for some of the CAS faculty members to reunite and be able to interact with each other again after a long while. The CAS conducted its first face-to-face faculty conference last January 2023 focusing on education in the age of Artificial Intelligence (Carrillo & Jose, 2022).

As faculty administrators, spearheading the implementation of these activities has been challenging as well since everything had to be done online. Some of our activities were well-attended (especially the Faculty Conferences) while some workshops were lacking in participants. Technical difficulties during virtual events also posed a challenge. However, we made sure that we considered the needs of the faculty in planning these activities through needs assessments.

Shift to Online transactions

Aside from teaching, almost all other university activities also had to transition to remote mode. This included enrolment, consultation, meetings, workshops, fora, conferences, and other relevant activities. The Office of the College Secretary, for example, was able to create a website and Facebook page where all the student forms could be easily accessed and downloaded. Facebook pages of CAS offices have also made communication with students more efficient, especially the posting of important announcements. Contactless transactions were implemented using QR codes and Google forms. Some of the forms were also automated to enhance efficiency. To better equip the staff for this shift to online mode, training and development were conducted to increase their skills and preparedness in a remote environment (Jose, Punzalan, & Carrillo, 2022).

Compassion and Flexibility for Affected Students

The pandemic caught the University off-guard, with the paradigm shift to lifelong learning, learning outcomes-based assessment, and technology-mediated blended learning still in the works. As previously mentioned, the pandemic provided an opportunity for the University to start implementing long-planned necessary changes. However, doing so might breach existing academic policies, rules, and program guidelines. To address this issue, the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs requested (approved by the Board of Regents on May 2, 2020) the suspension of academic policies, rules, and guidelines in AY 2020-2021 that would be affected by the "new normal's" requirement to shift to remote learning (Suspension of Existing Academic Rules and Policies Affected by the Shift to Remote and Online Learning for AY 2020-2021, 2020).

Alongside the suspension of academic rules, faculty members were enjoined to show compassion and flexibility to students especially those affected by Typhoon Ulysses in November 2020 and Typhoon Odette in December 2021. Thus, November 16-21, 2020, was declared as a Recovery Period where the conduct of synchronous and asynchronous activities as well as submission of course requirements were suspended. To accommodate a later submission of requirements for all students, the deadline for submission of grades was extended, and the 20% attendance rule was suspended, with attendance of students in synchronous sessions no longer required (OVPAAs Memorandum No. 2020-139, 2020). Students were also given a grade of “PASS” as an option for the Second Semester 2020-2021; issuance of numeric grades to students needing it, which were not counted in the computation of the General Weighted Average (GWA) of students (Approval of the Request of CU Chancellors on behalf of Units and Individual Faculty for Exemption from the Numeric Grade for the Second Semester 2020-2021, 2020). A Reading/Wellness Break was also included in the academic calendar to allow students to catch up, address backlogs in their readings, and course requirements; do advance readings; and/or take a break from the heavy demands of their courses and high-level COVID-19-induced anxiety (OVPAAs Memorandum No. 2021-2022, 2021; OVCAA Memorandum on Reading Break [FS, AY 2021-2022] Reminders to the Faculty, 2021).

Towards the end of 2021, plans were being prepared for the gradual opening of UP campuses from remote teaching and learning (RTL) to blended or face-to-face learning in the year 2022. To help the UP administration gauge the readiness of the faculty, an online survey was conducted (OVCAA Memorandum on UP Faculty Survey on the Gradual Opening of Campuses, 2021) and an online summit on the gradual opening of campuses was held last February 28, 2022, to contextualize the University’s plans for a safe return to campus; present the landscape of higher education beyond the pandemic; and present possible scenarios for blended learning (2022 Faculty Summit on the Gradual Re-opening of Campuses). While the CAS prepared for the new normal in education of the Blended Learning mode being decided by individual faculty members, infrastructure issues specific to the college had to be considered.

For CAS, infrastructure concerns complicated our planning for the return to the classroom-based instruction. Rizal Hall, one of the two academic buildings of the College of Arts and Sciences, is one of the oldest buildings of UP. It withstood near-complete destruction during World War II and in its various incarnations has served as the training ground for generations of *Iskolar ng Bayan*. Considered a heritage building, the centennial of the RH was observed last December 2021 (Jose, 2021). Because it is an old building, it requires periodic rehabilitation. A major renovation project was initiated in 2021 using a budget provided by the government through the General Appropriations Act (GAA of 2021). However, when mobilization and demolition began, significant structural defects were discovered, leading to a necessary readjustment of the planned work. Unfortunately, the allotted budget could no longer cover the full renovation of RH. Most classrooms housed in the building were rendered unusable. With the campus resuming full face-to-face classes in AY 2022 - 2023, the College had to contend with a severe shortage of usable spaces, such as

classrooms, offices, and libraries. Significant adjustments had to be made to allow students to resume classroom-based instruction, for example, by re-assigning classes to other UP Manila colleges and office spaces.

Fortuitously, the UP System, having acquired many digital tools such as Learning Management Systems, Zoom video communications, and the like in the pivot to online instruction, continues to utilize blended learning as an accepted mode of instruction, and only requires a minimum of 50% classroom-based instruction. This has allowed us to maximize classroom space on campus even as we continue to work towards improving our infrastructure.

With regards to the appeal to faculty members to show compassion and flexibility to affected students, grade inflation seemed to be one of the effects of this request, with the rise in the number of students graduating with Latin honors in recent graduation rites. Most of us were compelled to lessen the requirements, with some canceling the examination requirement and substituting it with other requirements such as reflection papers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic truly changed Philippine tertiary education's approach to instruction. In UP Manila, before the pandemic, there had already been various training on newer approaches to instruction, such as Flipped Classroom and blended learning, as well as online tools, such as Learning Management Systems, that faculty members were encouraged to incorporate into their teaching practices, but these were mostly met with indifference or even resistance. This was especially true for older faculty who had well-entrenched teaching methods honed through years of experience. While mostly effective, there was already a recognition at the administration level that more modern approaches that incorporated technology had to be adapted, as the current generation of learners are digital natives, who can access and harness information much more rapidly and effectively than earlier generations. The long lockdown periods left educators with no option but to finally embrace concepts of blended learning and remote instruction if the education of students was to proceed at all. The array of digital tools made available to us, as well as training prepared at the college level, significantly helped faculty members adapt to blended learning approaches. After a relatively steep learning curve, even older faculty members learned to navigate the use of Zoom for lectures and the use of LMS for student assessments and communications. In the process, they learned that certain aspects of remote or blended instruction are very useful, or are even more efficient, compared to face-to-face mode. For example, students can hand in class requirements in digital instead of printed formats, thus lessening the volume of papers that would need to be carried around and may also be graded digitally. Class discussions can continue using online discussion boards that may still be moderated by the instructor.

As we usher in the post-pandemic era, we see students back on campus, but classroom contact time can range anywhere from 50 to 100% of the semester, with the faculty laying

out class arrangements at the start of the semester. Students may have an online class or asynchronous activities in the first period and a face-to-face class in the next. While logistics can sometimes be difficult, especially with the infrastructure challenges that persist in our college, the flexibility has also been a boon to both students and faculty, as they do not necessarily need to travel to campus for all their classes. This has been especially beneficial in times of inclement weather; classes shift to online or asynchronous mode, instead of being canceled outright. The use of LMS continues to facilitate communication between faculty and students and enhance the teaching-learning process.

While face-to-face instruction is still the gold standard and is deemed to be the most effective and satisfactory by both faculty and students, online tools and blended learning approaches are now an important component of instruction in the College of Arts and Sciences. The shock of the transition to remote instruction produced a paradigm shift in most faculty members, who now recognize that these tools do not necessarily supplant, but rather supplement, classroom-based instruction. As technology advances and more and more challenges to education arise, for example, the advent of artificial intelligence, higher education administrators will need to continue to arm the faculty with various tools that will allow them to be effective educators and mentors.

As such, faculty administrators need to continue to be proactive in identifying new tools and approaches for instruction. The challenge is to be able to quickly assess their utility in terms of cost and ease of use; for example, would free versions of software or applications be adequate, or would pay versions be better for both faculty and students? Once the decision has been made on incorporating these tools in the instruction toolkit, the faculty members must then be properly oriented on their use, through appropriate training and guidelines. Also, since technology moves very quickly, administrators must be prepared to continuously evaluate a tool's usefulness, perhaps on a yearly basis. Teaching in higher education, especially in the post-pandemic era, necessitates constant reinvention to make sure that students are active, engaged participants in their studies, and will acquire the knowledge and skills that they need to be successful in their chosen professions.



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