



How to prevent failures in remote learning for higher education





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The world's education system is going through a global experiment as many schools adopt remote learning as the primary or supplementary learning methodology in their classrooms.

As COVID-19 spread throughout the country, faculty had to quickly adapt their in-person courses for remote classrooms. It worked as a stopgap while we came to terms with lockdown, but educators soon realized that it wasn't up to par with high-quality, in-person education or high-quality online-first programs provided by other institutions.

According to [Inside Higher Ed](#), the proportion of students who were highly satisfied with their learning experience fell from 51 percent pre-COVID, to 19 percent post-COVID. However, students were not the only ones who faced challenges. 60 percent of instructors said they struggled to keep students engaged.

As faculty and staff saw in the spring semester, delivering high-quality online instruction takes a lot of preparation and planning. With the right short and long-term planning, universities and colleges can empower students and faculty, setting themselves up for success for the remainder of the year.



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01

Where does your university fall on the digital transformation spectrum?

Prior to developing a strategy for streamlining and adapting virtual learning to your university setting, it's critical to identify exactly where your university resides on the digital transformation spectrum. [Harvard Business Review](#) outlines the three stages of digital transformation they see in educational institutions, particularly exacerbated by the COVID crisis. They are as follows:

Stage 1: Digital newcomers

Digital newcomers are characterized by their limited digital courses with less than 3 percent of their courses online. Faculty will frequently have limited access to hardware and software including collaboration tools, video conferencing, laptops, and webcams. Poor internet

connectivity on-campus also characterizes this group.

Next steps for digital newcomers

These universities should seek help from peer institutions, consultants, and technology companies to ensure their students and faculty have all they need to succeed.

Stage 2: Emerging adopters

Successful experimentation with online learning and basic communication and collaboration tools distinguish these emerging adopters from digital newcomers. These universities need to accelerate their momentum towards digital transformation quickly.

Next steps for emerging adopters

Emerging adopters should invest in a task force specifically dedicated to developing an online learning strategy. HBR recommends leveraging early adopters among departments, faculty, and staff to act as mentors and key architects of this strategy. With hands-on experience on the ground, these advocates will be able to report back on key learnings and can provide on-the-ground resources for other staff who may be more resistant to the changes.

Empowering these advocates with the resources and decision-making skills to create a turnkey solution will ensure your strategy is aligned with the specific needs of your campus and the pedagogy of your faculty.

Lastly, these universities should accelerate the production of online courses with open content from other institutions to help carry them through the upcoming months.

Step 3: Advanced institutions

The last stage of digital transformation for educational institutions is distinguished by robust technical infrastructure as well as a large catalog of educational content and a

faculty that is well-versed in online teaching.

Next steps for advanced institutions

These universities should focus on scaling this infrastructure across all programs using online courseware as digital textbooks. Administration should also work to make their remote learning equitable among different socio-economic backgrounds, assisting those who have limited internet connectivity and encouraging faculty to create an environment that facilitates live discussion.

As the most sophisticated universities adapt to the new reality of incorporating remote learning, they can elevate their university experience by facilitating crowd-sourced notes, study groups, virtual happy hours, and live events.

It is imperative that universities move through the digital transformation spectrum swiftly as remote learning becomes an integral part of the university experience. Avoid these mistakes as you work to improve your university's technological standing.

02

Remote learning mistakes higher educational institutions need to avoid

Mistake 1: Not investing in personalization

Universities should focus on humanizing and personalizing remote learning to their students. While basic-level courses require little personalization or human interaction, schools should invest heavily in developing custom online courses for advanced-level courses. Delivering courses to a large audience at a low cost can help offset the 1-on-1 investment in students.

Schools can place more resources on mentorship, career guidance, and faculty office hours to offset the lack of in-person classes ([Govindaraja](#), [Srivastava](#), [HBR](#)).

Personalizing the remote learning experience also means treating students as individuals with different needs. Schools should encourage students to ask for help if they are struggling with internet connectivity or investing in appropriate laptops.

[Learn how Zendesk can help universities manage relationships with students.](#)

Mistake 2: Not investing in designing new courses

Online courses require a different strategy from in-person classes. Administration should encourage faculty to rethink their teaching methods and adjust for their students.

Students are more likely to be distracted in long monologue lectures. Encouraging faculty to rethink traditional lectures and focus on weaving interactive material into their lesson plans, making them more interactive to better engage students.

Mistake 3: Not adopting the appropriate technology

Investing in software and hardware is crucial to keep classrooms running seamlessly. Universities with better IT infrastructure and higher IT support staff ratio will distinguish themselves from schools that are still catching up with remote learning technology, and keep students and parents confident that they should be investing in their education while schools operate remotely.

[*See how Zendesk helped the USC Annenberg's IT department run smoothly.*](#)

Schools can also leverage the shift to a digital format to their advantage. For example, give students more detailed feedback with voice feedback to supplement their written comments. This not only humanizes feedback for those looking for a connection, it also encourages students that they are not just a small square on a video call.

Mistake 4: Losing the human aspect of education

[*Many students report*](#) that in an online learning environment, they don't feel as though they belong to a peer group or a college cohort. In-person, students experience more competition, motivating all to excel.

Without being able to "read the room," faculty can remain clueless as to when students are checking email or finishing up another assignment. By encouraging interactive conversations and having more frequent office hours, faculty can ensure students feel comfortable in asking for assistance. By opening up additional communication channels, professors can provide more personalized support and adjust their teaching strategy.

Mistake 5: Not dedicating a task force to creating an online strategy

With no certain path over the upcoming months, it is imperative that your university or college invest in creating a specific task force to develop a short and long-term digital and online strategy.

This task force should define best practices in use by your faculty, as well as student response to the spring and fall

online experience. As the task force has a better grasp of areas of improvement, the task force can also create actionable measures to work to make changes on campus to improve the student experience.

Mistake 6: Not learning from mistakes

Faculty should be encouraged to make changes to syllabi and course contents. Teaching and learning should be an iterative process, changing based on how students are understanding course material.

Universities need to get continuous feedback and encourage faculty to experiment, fail, learn, and iterate.

Remote learning is an inevitable future at least in some respect. Take these upcoming months of experimentation to ensure your institution is future proofing for the long-term and investing in the future.

03

Zendesk for Education

Helping colleges and universities provide the best experiences for their students and staff

Today's universities are continuously strained as they adjust to the new realities of remote learning, budget cuts, and rising demands. Schools are ramping up quickly

to ensure their students are receiving the best education possible. Zendesk helps schools big and small provide efficient support to students, parents, and faculty.

Join these [higher ed institutions](#) in transforming student experience



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