

# The Coronavirus Effect: Building Learner-Centered Instruction in the Classroom

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## Abstract

Due to disruptive changes such as COVID-19, universities can achieve better student outcomes with a shift to a learner-centered strategy. During the Spring semester, colleges and universities were forced to operate remotely due to COVID-19. With that said, faculty abruptly changed their teaching method of face-to-face format to mostly online education. According to a Chronicle survey of faculty members and academic administrators, 60% of faculty and administrators said that the COVID-19 semester was much worse. With the second wave of COVID-19 predicted by some health authorities, faculty needs to shift toward learner-centered instruction for greater student outlines especially when operating remotely. This article examines how faculty can infuse learner-centered instruction and provides some best practices to create better student outcomes.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Coronavirus; Learner-Centered Instruction; Disruptive Change.

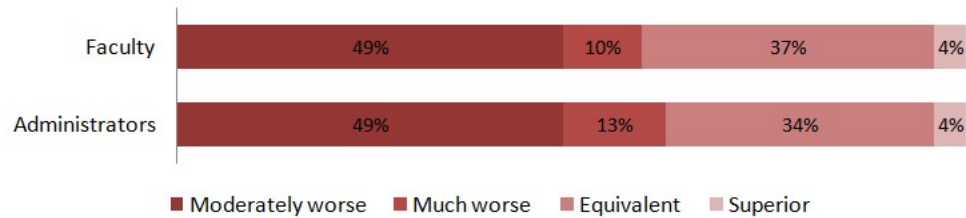
## 1. INTRODUCTION

*I did not think it was a real threat. Today, I knew it was real. My president set out an email to our university family stating that we were working remotely....all classes would be online. I was stunned. My students started emailing me even though they were still enjoying their Spring Break. The COVID-19 had disrupted our normal like it has done with the rest of the world. My colleagues are grumbling. Some do not even know how to use the learning management system while others have never taught online before. Our dean is sympathetic to them. She tells them to contact the IT Department. However, the IT Department has been flooded with calls from faculty, students, and angry parents. In my mind, I thought the transition would be easy since I organized all my courses as a hybrid. Yet, the first week of the remote experience left a bad taste in my mouth. Initially, I planned to teach the course on the same date. However, I got calls from students saying they do not have internet or reliable internet at home. Others complained that the time would not work since they lived in a different part of the world. I opted not to change the course assignments which left me grading 270 assignments on the first weekend. I knew I had to do something different. I focused on my students' learning experience instead of what I was teaching. This mindset got me through this semester.*

Given the continuous battle with COVID-19, universities can achieve better student outcomes with a shift to a learner-centered strategy. During the Spring semester, colleges and universities were forced to operate remotely due to COVID-19. Green *et al.* (2020) suggested an alternative approach for these organizations; they offered an entrepreneurial mindset for academic institutions due to the financial pressures and demands from government officials. With that said, faculty abruptly changed their teaching method of face-to-face format to mostly online education. According to a Chronicle survey of faculty members and academic administrators from two-and four-year institutions, resulting in 935 faculty and 595 academic administrators, 60% of faculty and administrators said that the semester was much worse, (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020). There was a major decline in the students' connection with the course. Approximately eight out of 10 faculties stated that engaging students remotely was a challenge (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020). See Figure 1. With the second wave of COVID-19 predicted by some health authorities, faculty needs to shift toward learn-centered instruction for greater student outlines especially when operating remotely. This article examines how faculty to infuse learner-centered instruction and provides best practices to create better student outcomes.

## 2. THE URGENCY

The coronavirus has had a tremendous impact on our lives as global citizens. Most countries across the globe have been impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19), and nearly a half-million people have lost their lives to it according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Faculty members and administrators agreed that their institutions' online courses in the spring were inferior to their face-to-face format.

**Figure 1: Faculty-Administrators' perception of course quality.**

Source: The Chronicle of Higher Education 2020 Survey.

In the United States, there have been more than two million cases of the respiratory virus and over 125,000 deaths. New York was the early epicenter of the virus, with a secondary surge impacting the southern half of the United States dramatically (WHO, 2020). Individuals have been acted to change their behavior, especially the use of social distancing. Many businesses and non-profit organizations have been shut down. The WHO Director, Dr. Hans Henri P Kluge, said: "The lives of millions of people in our region are undergoing radical change. There is quite simply a new reality." Maintaining the status quo will not work in a pandemic situation (Chappell and Rome, 2020).

COVID-19 has required academic institutions to move beyond their comfort zone to move toward a learner-centered approach. For a hundred years or more, faculty have been able to utilize the same pedagogical model of focusing on the subject rather than students (National Research Council, 1999). Enrollment in accredited colleges and universities has shrunk consistently since 2010 since the rising of online learning (Horn, 2018). In fact, experts like Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christensen predict doom. Christensen suggested that 50% of colleges and universities would be close over the next decade (Horn, 2018). Yet, many institutions may opt to ignore these disruptive trends as a temporary setback.

### 3. LEARNER-CENTERED-BEST PRACTICES FOR TODAY'S FACULTY

Given the level of disruptive change in higher education including COVID-19, faculty should shift their teaching approach from subject-centered to learner-centered to increase student outcomes (Peng and Kotak, 2020). Recent studies on higher education learning achievement have pointed out that student learning outcomes can be significantly improved through increased teaching quality, curriculum design innovation, and optimization of resource equipment. Thus, the strategy of learning engagement is the key to gain experience and turn it into their knowledge and capabilities (Peng and Kotak, 2020). Below are some best practices to assist today's faculty with learner-centered instruction to increase student outcomes:

#### 3.1. Professors must create course materials that are tailored to the needs of their students

Instructors should meet the needs of their students based on their level. Professors must pay close attention to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners bring into the classroom (National Research Council, 1999). Many times, professors depend on textbooks that are not tailored to the needs of their students. One best practice would be to create a textbook tailored to the needs of the professor's class. See Figure 2.

#### 3.2. The professor must have an in-depth knowledge of the subject themselves

In teaching Generation Z students, professors must be able to convey the concise of the theories (National Research Council, 1999). In fact, using outdated materials and examples will only lead to frustration in students who are accustomed to real-time answers and solutions. Therefore, superficial coverage of the subject area must be replaced with in-depth coverage before an instructor can develop powerful pedagogical tools, he or she must be familiar with current literature and research (National Research Council, 1999). One best practice would be to conduct collaborative research that the professor is passionate about and that students are engaged.

In 2018, a team of my students was able to take a business case study assignment related to popular culture to publication. I shared my expertise in organizational culture with the class. My depth of understanding organizational culture and scholarship helped energized the students toward publication. The paper examined how Record Producer Jimmy Lovine and hip-hop icon Dr. Dre were able to turn a small sub-culture into a global, multi-billion-dollar business. The research paper observed how Beats by Dr. Dre used exceptional marketing techniques to target the millennial age group, including the use of celebrities alongside incorporating customizable headphones for each popular figure (Green *et al.*, 2019). Thus, professors with demonstrated knowledge can influence greater student outcomes. See Figure 3.

Figure 2: Small business marketing textbook.

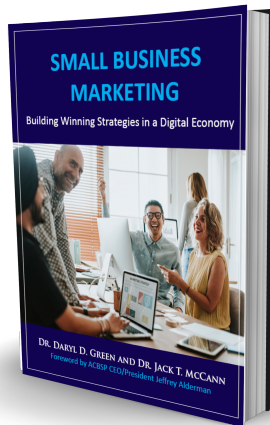


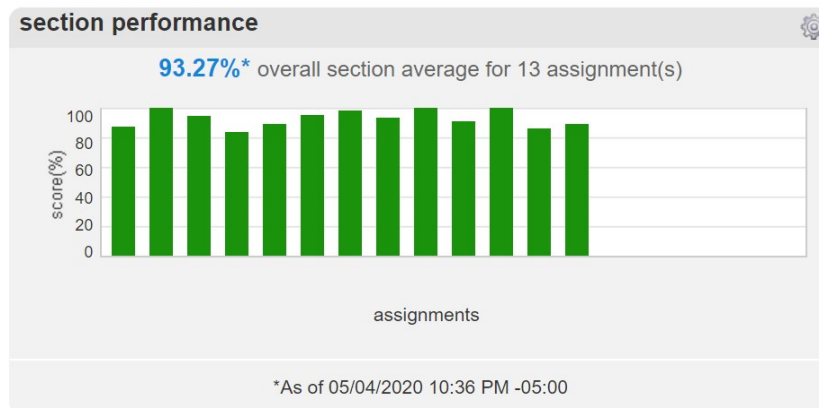
Figure 3: Dr. Green collaboration with his marketing students.



Professor can utilize artificial intelligence to assist in better assessing student outcomes. Sadly, many professors do not update their assessment tools, relying on traditional testing methods such as exams and quizzes (National Research Council, 1999).

Hands-on experiments can be a powerful source for students to understand the underlying conceptual understandings that aid generalization. One best practice would be to use an AI tool like McGraw-Hill’s Connect (LEARNSMART). See Figure 4.

Figure 4: LEARNSMART performance results of the class.



#### 4. THE PATH FORWARD

In today’s disruptive and technological environment, universities can no longer accept the status quo. Faculty must be willing to shift their instructional approach toward a learner-centered application to achieve better student outcomes.

Strategies should utilize hyflex and hybrid classrooms that include virtual visiting scholars for class and community; student discussion leadership; professor as a host rather than lecturer (flipped classroom); and plain talk of racial limitations within the discipline and the professor are important practices to utilize in the “new normal.”

Due to disruptive changes such as COVID-19, universities can achieve better student outcomes with a shift to a learner-centered strategy. With the second wave of COVID-19 predicted by some health authorities, faculty needs to shift toward learn-centered instruction for greater student outlines especially when operating remotely. This article examines how faculty to infuse learner-centered instruction and provides best practices to create better student outcomes.

**Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

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**Biographical Notes**

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