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# Expectations for Teaching Post-COVID

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## Results from Focus Groups Held with NACOE Faculty

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## Background

- During the 2021 Academic Year, MSU used BLENDED delivery to continue offering courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach reduced the number of people on campus, enabled social distancing, and enabled students to continue in the class while either infected or in quarantine.
- This led to a variety of instructional issues including:
  - *Excessive faculty workload / faculty burnout*
  - *Low student attendance / engagement*
- Starting in Fall-21, MSU plans to return to offering courses in the same modality as pre-COVID (i.e., LIVE).
- There are concerns that when returning to LIVE instruction in Fall-21, students will carry-over some of the unrealistic expectations that were developed during COVID BLENDED course delivery.
- The NACOE Dean asked the MEERC to solicit feedback from faculty on what the guidelines for *realistic teaching expectations* should be in Fall-21.
- These realistic expectations should balance **achieving course outcomes** with **faculty workload** while still handling **extended absences** due to COVID.



## Guiding Questions for the Data Collection

- 1) What are realistic expectations for teaching in the Fall-21 semester within the NACOE?
- 2) How will your experience teaching during COVID influence your teaching going forward (either in the positive or negative)?



## Approach

- **Qualitative Research** – collecting non-numerical data to understand opinions and experiences. Useful for identifying overarching themes from lived experiences.

## Theoretical Framework

- **Grounded Theory** – Collect rich data on a topic of interest and develop theories inductively (i.e., let the theory develop from the data instead of testing an existing theory).

## Method

- **Focus Groups** – Asking questions and generating discussion among a group of people.
- **Details** – Five (5), 1-hour focus groups were held with NACOE faculty during the week of 4/5/21 – 4/9/21. Moderated by Brock LaMeres.



## Data Analysis

- **Thematic Analysis** – Identifies and interprets patterns and themes in the qualitative data.
- **Data Collection** – The focus group discussions were recorded.
- **Data Preparation** – The focus group recordings were transcribed using Otter.AI.
- **Data Review** – The transcript was proofed to correct any transcription mistakes.
- **Code Development** – During proof reading, an initial set of “codes” were developed. Codes represent themes observed in the data.
- **Coding** – The transcripts were then reviewed again, and phrases were “tagged” (or marked) with one of the codes. The codes and associated phrases were then extracted for analysis.
- **Theme Identity** – Based on the frequency and volume of phrases within each code, themes that were relevant to the research questions were identified. Non-verbal emphasis (i.e., head nodding in the focus group recordings) observed by the moderator were inserted into the tags as moderator notes as these data did not show up in the transcript. This approach was also used to capture contribution to a theme with words that didn’t by themselves support the theme (i.e., “yes”, “I agree”, “for sure”).



## Outcome Format

- **Summary Outcomes** - The major themes are written as a grammatically correct statement with an explanation of the theme.
- **Verbatim Supporting Data** – A complete, verbatim list of all phrases that were tagged for each code was recorded without any speaker identification and archived. This is typically not provided in an outcome report (or paper) but can be made available upon request.



## Descriptive Statistics

- Participants: 29 faculty from NACOE (~22% of college)

<i>Civil</i>	5
<i>CS</i>	5
<i>ECE</i>	6
<i>M&amp;IE</i>	8
<i>ChemBio</i>	1
<i>ROTC</i>	1
<i>COE</i>	3

- Tenure vs. Non-Tenure Track

<i>TT</i>	21
<i>NTT</i>	8

- Gender

<i>Male</i>	15
<i>Female</i>	14



## **Theme #1 - Faculty want the freedom and backing to teach in the mode they feel is best for their class.**

- Pre-COVID expectations were that each instructor had the freedom to teach the class in the mode they thought was best to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- This didn't mean that an instructor had the discretion to convert a LIVE listed class to fully ONLINE delivery without approval, but they did have the ability to use in-class time for active learning and even skip live lectures from time to time to have students work with asynchronous learning materials outside of class.
- Instructors do not want to be mandated to be back in class doing chalk-n-talk style lectures and not have the freedom to modify the teaching mode from time-to-time as they see fit.
- MSU should not have “attendance police” walking the halls making sure all instructors are in their pre-assigned rooms at their pre-assigned times. While this statement is an extreme metaphor, it represents what faculty are imagining in the absence of communication and the looming fear of a “mandate”.
- Without a mandate to teach LIVE in Fall-21, 90% of focus group participants want and plan to be back in the classroom teaching LIVE just as they did pre-COVID.





## Theme #2 – Listing a course as LIVE in Fall-21 needs to carry special meaning.

- LIVE needs to mean something. If a class is listed LIVE, the expectation is that students are accountable for what is covered in class. (whether present in class or absent). This expectation should be stated on day 1 and backed up by syllabus language and through campus-wide communications from MSU administration.
- A LIVE class should NOT support synchronous streaming of the course.
  - *Synchronous streaming emerged as the most time-consuming part of blended teaching and the one that led to the highest level of dissatisfaction with student engagement.*
  - *A policy of **banning synchronous streaming for LIVE listed classes** would be a positive step by the college.*
  - *If a faculty member decides to stream their class, it should be listed as BLENDED (more later).*
- Instructors of LIVE classes are NOT expected to record their lectures unless they want to.
  - *Recording lectures emerged as the second most time-consuming part of blended teaching and the one that led to the highest level of faculty frustration with technology and dissatisfaction with student attendance.*
  - *While an instructor can record their lecture, it is not mandatory and is the sole decision of the instructor.*



## Theme #2 – Listing a course as LIVE in Fall-21 needs to carry special meaning. (CONTINUED...)

- If a student is absent, they are responsible for learning the material on their own using supplemental course materials.
- Faculty are responsible for providing supplemental course materials for absent students. There is NO EXPECTATION that the supplemental materials are as comprehensive or as high-quality as what was covered in class. When a student is absent from class, they miss the best instruction of the material.
- Supplemental course materials provided by the faculty can include one or more of:
  - *Textbook reading assignments.*
  - *Instructor notes.*
  - *Links to videos created by others (youtube)*
  - *A recording of in-class lecture (NOT MANDATORY).*
  - *Powerpoint slides used in lecture.*
  - *Course handouts.*
  - *A pre-recorded “recap” video by instructor.*
- While 100% of focus group participants agreed that expecting instructors to provide supplementary course materials would be seen as “more work” by the faculty, 100% of the participants were already providing supplementary course materials!
- There was uniform agreement that if we expect students to be accountable for what is covered in class when absent, faculty should be expected to provide resources.



## Theme #3 – Offering a course in a BLENDED or ONLINE format shouldn't be banned in Fall-21.

- The vast majority of the participants thought that MSU's value proposition (i.e., the MSU Brand) should be an on-campus, hands-on, collaborative experience.
- However, most participants agreed that there were benefits to BLENDED and ONLINE teaching including:
  - *Unique ways to engage the students (breakout rooms, sharing software tools).*
  - *Advantageous of showing technology tools that are difficult to see and interact with in class.*
  - *Reaching working professionals (specifically for graduate classes).*
  - *A way to offers strategic courses that prevent pre-req chains that potentially lead to extended time-to-graduation*
- 10% of the focus group participants would prefer to offer their course either BLENDED or ONLINE in Fall-21.
- If an instructor wishes to teach in either BLENDED or ONLINE format, it should be listed that way in MyInfo. An instructor should NOT use a BLENDED delivery in any course that is listed as LIVE in MyInfo.



## Theme #3 – Offering a course in a BLENDED or ONLINE format shouldn't be banned in Fall-21. (CONTINUED...)

- The decision of which classes should be offered in BLENDED/ONLINE should be made in consultation with the department head.
- Departments should be thoughtful and strategic about which classes are offered ONLINE. For example:
  - *Don't just offer a course ONLINE because you can.*
  - *Think through the benefit of an ONLINE offering.*
    - Does it extend MSU's offerings to working professionals?
    - Does it support a certificate for working professionals?
    - Does it speed time-to-graduation by addressing a pre-req bottleneck?
    - Does it provide flexibility to a certain student demographic (i.e., veterans, Non-traditional, Native Americans)
- Having a subset of courses that can be offered ONLINE can be beneficial to our college. But most of our offerings should be LIVE to promote the MSU Brand.



## Theme #4 – Faculty are members of the university community and would like to be treated as stakeholders.

- Moderator Observation: Faculty morale is LOW!!! Worst I've seen in 15 years.
- During COVID-19, MSU's only directive was "student success is our #1 priority".
- A laudable goal, but faculty felt this was pushed down to those in the classroom without any support or direction on how to accomplish it. As a result, faculty let unrealistic expectations from students drive their teaching approach and led to an incredible amount of work for instructors.
- Decisions made without faculty input exacerbated the problem. Examples include:
  - *Academic calendar changes.*
  - *Eliminating finals*
  - *Removing 6 days of pay from our 2020 earnings (which NEVER came back!)*
- The increased instructor workload during COVID was more severe for new faculty that haven't taught the course before and NTT faculty that don't have a research component of their contract to borrow time from.
- Faculty feel there has been no support from MSU in the form of reduced teaching assignments, TA support, technical support, and accommodations for PnT (Note that pausing the PnT clock is not very attractive to faculty).



## Theme #5 – There were positive “lessons learned” that came from teaching during COVID that will influence future teaching.

- Technology
  - *All participants reported using BrightSpace for course administration.*
  - *Faculty now know how to create short content videos. This has led to course resources that can be used in the future.*
  - *WebEx/Zoom meetings have been found to work very well for certain applications:*
    - Office hours.
    - Group meetings (primarily due to reducing scheduling conflict).
  - *Faculty have learned to use tools that increase efficiency and consistency.*
    - Having students turn in assignments by scanning to PDFs with phones and uploading to an assignment folder.
    - GradeScope
- Use of Lecture Time
  - *Many faculty have seen how impactful active-learning activities are in the classroom. This was in-part enabled by learning how to use the technology to create asynchronous course content for viewing outside of class in preparation for an in-class activity.*



## Theme #6 – General observations on student behavior

- If a student is given the option to come to class or watch a streamed version, the vast majority will choose to **stay home**.
- If a student is given the option to come to class or watch an asynchronous video of the class, the vast majority will choose **not** to come to class.
- Students tend to not do anything unless there is a grade associated with it (i.e., participate in class, attend class)
- When attendance is part of the grade, it needs to be worth higher than one would think. 2% of a grade doesn't seem to matter to a student. It is only when you get close to 10% that you can see major influence on behavior.



## In Support of a LIVE Listed Course

This course is being conducted in a LIVE delivery format. As the student, you are responsible for the content that is covered during class. There will be no live-streaming of this course. While an instructor may choose to record their lecture for viewing later, it is not required by MSU. In the case of an absence, you are responsible for covering the material from class using supplemental course materials. These materials will be provided by the instructor and may include one or more of the following: textbook reading assignments; Powerpoint slides used in lecture; instructor notes; course handouts; links to videos created by others (i.e., youtube), a pre-recorded “recap” video by instructor, a recording of in-class lecture. There is no expectation that the supplemental course materials will cover the course material as comprehensively or as high quality as the in-class lecture. The in-class coverage of material represents the highest quality delivery of the material.





## Many Faculty Asked the MEERC/College to Facilitate:

- More opportunities to talk about teaching with other faculty within the college.
- More “training” on classroom technology. Upon further prompting, it is more accurate to say that faculty want to learn about what others are currently doing in their class and share what they are doing.
- More peer evaluations of teaching (not tied to PnT).

