

RESEARCH BRIEF

Trial by Fire: Innovative Approaches and Evaluation of Course Transition During COVID-19

Authored by: Sujeeta E. Menon, Virginia (Ginger) Lucas, and Susan P. Robbins

Through COVID-19 we learned it is critical to adopt effective teaching and learning strategies that include teaching with compassion and empathy.

Why is this research important?

- The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) officially labeled the corona-virus as a global pandemic and as of May 3rd 2021, it has impacted 32,228,003 people in the United States
- The pandemic presented a unique and challenging opportunity for education nationwide. This study looks to understand how COVID-19 affected the educational experience of students
- The study focused on new and unique approaches during the pandemic to ensure that the course changes were not overwhelming to students when going from face-to-face to online instruction
- The goal of this research was to help create future strategies that could be permanently implemented

Who was part of this study and how was the research conducted?

- Students in the Master of Social Work program at the University of Houston (UH) in six face-to-face and online MSW courses was gathered and analyzed
- Faculty incorporated innovative technology tools and flexibility in the classroom while maintaining the course curriculum and instruction integrity
- Using polls to create word clouds allowed for professors to check in on the emotional state of students

What did we find?

- Students were highly satisfied with the transition efforts
- Educator's demonstrated unique approaches that reminded them to teach with compassion and empathy
- Innovative use of technology and assessment tools were beneficial for engaging students online
- Although students appreciated the emotional check in's there was a need for changes to course content/deadlines to be reflected through all online resources or learning portals such as BlackBoard

Action steps for educators

- Ensure balance in course instruction with teacher-student empathy, flexibility, and compassion towards students' challenges
- Maintain integrity of course instruction by empowering students in choosing the pace of their learning
- Allow students to complete their major assignments individually or in groups, prepare for these assignments during designated class time and alter the assignment to reflect the current crisis
- Incorporate the school's mission and vision through any changes to allow for a sense of continuity

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

This study was conducted by three researchers from the graduate college of social work. Dr. Sujeeta E. Menon is a licensed Master social worker and a juvenile justice researcher who does research involving justice-involved young women. She manages a new federally grant funded program for these young women known as the VOICES program, written, and designed by her and administered through a local non-profit known as Change Happens.

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Contact Information: Dr. Sujeeta E. Menon(+1 346-212-5778) (sulizmenon@gmail.com)