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Challenges to Virtual Instruction

In Normal Circumstances
1. Focus and attention
2. Staying up with deadlines
3. Change in learning style
4. Learning new virtual technologies
5. Technology access and glitches
6. Not knowing when or how to get help

During a Pandemic
1. Mental and physical health
2. Increased work or family care hours
3. Insecurity in housing, food, financials, etc.
4. Every professor making different choices
5. Lack of communication or clarity from uni
Technology Issues and Access

• Each class should have required technology in the syllabus; if it does not, contact the instructor during add/drop for clarification.

• If you cannot meet the technology requirements for the course, such as a webcam that is always on during Zoom, discuss an accommodation with the instructor; use what the university provides in terms of loaner laptops or tablets and wifi hotspot.

• If you share a device, try to keep all your files in a folder with your name on it; lock it if you can; also consider using an external hard drive or thumb drive or a cloud like Drive.

• Does your instructor require a lockdown browser or other software with privacy concerns? You have some agency in resisting that if you discuss it with them politely. Other universities have policies about these. You could push for CPP to set one.
Learning Style, Focus, and Attention

**Best Practices**

- Study in a quiet space separate from where you eat, sleep, or play
- No distractions such as pets or children
- Do one thing at a time; close your browser with other websites and focus on class
- Be completely present in synchronous coursework and take notes as we discuss
- Give virtual lectures all your attention, not as background noise; take careful notes throughout

**Good Enough Practices**

- Work in a space that does not cause physical discomfort
- Use headphones or a way to decrease distraction when you are engaged in coursework
- Try to monotask to maximize your study time
- Get as much as you can out of synchronous work and review the transcript or recording later to see what you missed, if possible
- Watch videos while you can give them most of your attention; jot down notes after if not during
Optional Activity: Plan Your Space

Take five minutes and think through where you intend to work and how you can best set yourself up for success. Incorporate as much of the advice on the previous slide as is useful to you.

For example: anticipate your distractions and think about how you might work around them; find a comfortable space to view video lectures that will also allow you to take notes; communicate with your housemates or family members about when you will need to be left alone.
Managing Deadlines

Best Practices

• Use your syllabi and a planner to chart the semester’s deadlines for every class

• Add in work time for class prep, synchronous meetings, and work or family time to block off when you work or play during the week

• Plan backward from your deadlines to predict how much time each will take and anticipate when you will have rough weeks that require advance work

• Set notifications for 24 hours before each deadline

• Contact with your professor early with issues; do not wait until 5 minutes before something is due

Good Enough Practices

• Plan out each week in advance in planner or app and write down your hard deadlines

• Remember to block regular time for course prep and leisure activity to prevent burnout

• Try to anticipate when you might need to work less or get childcare based on the week’s workload

• Build in some form of accountability for deadlines such as calendar notifications or using an app

• Contact with your professor as early as possible with issues and anticipate them having normal work hours (so they might not answer you ASAP)
Optional Activity: Plan Your Semester

Try mapping out next week in a physical planner, an app like Google Calendars, or just a piece of paper. Include:
• Any work hours or family obligations
• Synchronous course meetings
• Deadlines for assignments
• Other appointments

Then, block off time when you will be doing course prep. Be specific: from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., I will be prepping for Women Writers. From noon to 1 p.m. I will be working on my reflection. Include time to cook, eat, clean, and all the other things that make life possible.
Increased Workload, Care, or Insecurities

Treat this like you would any other semester. If you can’t normally work 40 hours a week and take a full course load with face-to-face instruction, you probably can’t do it with virtual instruction. You might need to take fewer classes or a semester break.

Is this completely ‘fair’? No. But if you try to do it anyway, you may end up having to withdraw, doing poorly in your classes, or burning out. If you’re not sure, it’s a good time to talk to an adviser.
Math! A week has \textbf{168 hours}.\\

\textbf{12-hour course load} \\
36 hours of prep time \\
+ 12 hours of in-class time \\
= \textbf{48-hour work week}\\

\textbf{15-hour course load} \\
45 hours of prep time \\
+ 15 hours of in-class time \\
= \textbf{60-hour work week}\\

If you work 40 hours a week and take a full course load, you will have between 60 and 100 hours of work depending on the week. If you also intend to sleep, which I hope you do, that leaves you almost no time to commute, cook, eat, clean, or do a hobby. You can’t see your friends or spend time with family. This is why you are likely to burn out. And this is why you might do poorly in classes you’d otherwise do well in.
1. Are you good at managing deadlines? If so, take one or two asynchronous courses to give yourself flexibility. If not, take synchronous courses with instructors who seem communicative or who have set up a regular schedule you can follow.

2. For work hours: talk to your supervisor about scheduling around your classes. Be polite, but you never know unless you ask. If they decline, take classes with flexible deadlines or ones that require synchronous meetings when you can attend.

3. For food or housing insecurity, reach out to Bronco Cares or local food banks.

4. Communicate with your instructors before the end of add/drop about your situation. How they respond to your requests will tell you if this is the right class for you. Don’t know how to word the email? I have provided some sample templates on Blackboard.
Optional Activity: Reflection

If you are dealing with increased demands on your time, consider your workload this semester and decide what changes you can make to allow yourself to be successful. Write down two or more tasks that you want to complete. They could be things like:

- I will meet with an adviser to get advice on my course load and degree plan
- I will take fewer courses or decrease my work hours so I have time for class
- I am going to find some asynchronous classes so I can manage my time
- I am going to carefully review syllabus policies and pick classes with the flexibility that I need
- I will communicate with my instructors early if I have a problem
Mental and Physical Health

I’m operating on the assumption that me, my colleagues, and most of our students will get sick. Hopefully not at the same time and hopefully I’m over-prepared. I’m also operating on the assumption that both me and most of my students are really struggling with extended pandemic protocols, isolation, anxiety, protests for social justice, and the upcoming election.

This means that mental and physical health concerns are going to shape our semester. Let’s not pretend otherwise.
Physical Health

Prioritize your own health. Nothing is more important than you being alive and either thriving or working toward getting there. If you or a family member that you care for gets physically ill:

• Email your instructors and explain the situation; ask each for help coming up with a plan for your coursework for the upcoming weeks

• If you have covid-like symptoms, try to get tested so it can be tracked; follow isolation guidelines to prevent further infection

• If your employer is not following protocols or demands you work without properly quarantining, you have rights. See this website for an example (obligatory: I am not a lawyer)

Due to the difficulty of getting tested, I will not require positive results to offer an extension. However, see the syllabus for more information on extensions and late work.
The mental challenges of continual stay at home orders or having to be an essential worker during a pandemic are documented by the CDC. This means that if you are feeling less than motivated, tired, or like you can’t focus, this is not a personal failing. It is a symptom of living through a very stressful time. Acknowledging that and not blaming yourself is step one.

As with the last slide, prioritize your health. Nothing is more important than you being alive and either thriving or working toward getting there. The CDC recommends:

- Eating well and regularly
- Meditating or other mindfulness activities
- Sleeping regularly
- Avoiding excessive alcohol or drug use
- Exercising a few times a week
- Connecting with your communities

If at any point, you feel overwhelming sadness or despair, get help. Call the Suicide Prevention hotline at 1-800-273-8255.
Flexibility is built into this course. I will work with you to complete everything you need. Keep in mind my syllabus late policies and your other instructors’ policies.

If you get seriously sick:
- and have completed most of your coursework, if the instructor is willing, you can take an incomplete
- you can pursue a withdrawal or retroactive withdrawal
Optional Activity: Self-Care
Brainstorm

Brainstorm ways you can unwind, relax, destress, and simply take pleasure in things you enjoy. This is part of balancing the stressors of college and living in 2020. Write down 3-5 of your favorite things and make time in your calendar to do them regularly. Some ideas:

- Puzzles or games with friends virtually
- Cooking special meals
- Bath bombs, skincare, makeup
- Watching a favorite show
- Reading for pleasure
- Cross-stich, knitting, or other textile craft
- Video games (but watch screen time)
- Virtual meetups with friends and family
Lack of Communication or Clarity

Students are often frustrated with the university’s policies because they seem slow or confused. As faculty, I am sometimes frustrated, too, while being the cause of others’ frustration. Here is what I can promise

• I will communicate with you about in-progress decisions when it is safe to do so and with the appropriate qualifiers. I do not speak for the university. For example, I would prepare for a digital spring. No policy has been articulated by the CSU and they are preparing for multiple scenarios. So, maybe I’m wrong! But I would.

• I will work very hard to clarify my policies. If you are confused, ask. I’m not trying to trick you. We’re on the same team here: team survive 2020 and learn some stuff.
I have found that email templates help students who are trying to ask for clarification or communicate with their instructors professionally and respectfully. I posted some of the ones I have offered over the years on Blackboard. Feel free to use these (even with me). For this activity, you just need to review them:

- Communicating a problem with Blackboard or other technical issue
- Asking for more feedback on your work
- Requesting an appointment
- Requesting an extension
- Requesting a letter of recommendation
- Requesting an incomplete
Some useful resources:

- EML Department Info (includes adviser information)
- College-Specific Success Centers
- Bronco Advising Center
- Learning Center
- Disability Resource Center
- Career Center
- Bronco Basic Needs
- Student Counseling