

## First Week In... Thoughts From Bentley Students About the Shift to Online Learning

The Office of Academic Services hears first-hand from Bentley students about classroom experiences as well as personal concerns. After the first week of online course delivery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Academic Services staff compiled student-generated recommendations and reminders. We hope this will provide insights into our students' current experiences and some tips for enhancing student and faculty well-being.

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**REMEMBER:** The Bentley Care team continues to support student wellbeing during this period. Visit <https://www.bentley.edu/offices/student-affairs/bentley-cares> to learn more.

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**Communicate frequently.** Students are very worried about how classes and their relationships with you are going to proceed from here.

**Be kind to yourself and to your students.** This is a HUGE and strange shift for all of us.

Remind yourself and students **we're all in this together.**

**Normalize the messiness of the situation moving the course online mid-semester** and ask for their input in keeping the course moving.

**Proceed cautiously with COVID-19-related lectures and assignments.** Faculty may be tempted to deliver lectures and design projects and papers that are COVID-19 related in an effort to keep material current and relevant. This may be of interest and helpful to some students, but others may be feeling COVID-19 overload. Further, while students may initially need to express and process feelings, they may reach saturation and look to school to escape it. Read the room and survey the students. When developing assignments, allow them the flexibility to choose the topic.

**See the opportunity** of individual and communal growth and openly communicate that to students and colleagues.

**Use your resources.** Bentley is here for you. Reach out. Ask for help. (The [Keep Teaching@Bentley](#) page on the Bentley website is a good place to start.)

**Know that not all students are in their native homes.** Some are staying locally with friends, a few are on campus, some with extended family. Some students were not allowed to return to their home countries because of border closings. This may mean that students are continually worried about family and friends from a distance and students are living in unfamiliar settings leading to feelings of discomfort.

**Remember that students come from varying home environments and may worry about your judgment of setting and resource availability revealed through Zoom.** For example, a student may share a bedroom with siblings/cousins/other family members. They may not have a desk to use. They can't go to the library because of Shelter in Place guidelines. Use caution in commenting or pointing things out about their virtual or real backgrounds especially in front of the class. Even positive comments may embarrass or call attention to aspects of a student's home life that they would prefer to keep private.

***Don't assume students are less busy now.*** Some students now have home responsibilities to tend to (e.g., child or eldercare, household chores) in addition to their schoolwork. We have heard from advisees who have had to pick up an additional job to help family meet current financial needs.

***Remember that some students are returning home to dysfunctional and potentially unhealthy situations, making this time additionally stressful.*** Support Service referrals, including the Counseling Center, can help.

***Remember that some students are food and shelter insecure.*** We have students who are otherwise homeless when not on campus.

***Remember time zone changes and be as flexible as possible.*** Record classes. Develop alternative assignments to assess keeping up with lectures and developing material mastery. (The [Keep Teaching@Bentley](#) page on the Bentley website contains online pedagogy resources and contact information.)

***Some students have limited internet access.*** We've heard from international students who returned home to mandated quarantine camps and centers with limited or no internet access. We've heard from others that internet connectivity in their areas is slow. Some families have resource limitations. Encourage students to tell you if this is the case and try to make allowances where possible. Consider alternative assignments. Email and Blackboard chats and discussion boards take less real time connectivity than Zoom. Consider allowing students to prove their mastery of material and participation through other means. Where you can, be more fluid with deadlines.

***If your classes were high student participation before, try to keep them that way.*** If they were not, try adding participation elements to keep lecture and classroom presence active. Consider using break-out rooms in Zoom in which students discuss aspects of the material (you can pop-in and listen to their discussion) and then bring discussion points back to the larger class as a whole. Use Zoom polls requiring students to weigh in. Try to engage students in some way every 6-8 minutes.

***If your class is a doubleblock ("a bomb"), be sure to incorporate breaks.*** Most of us do this when teaching "bombs" in person, and it's even more critical now. Sitting and watching a computer screen for two hours and 40 minutes is a long time to be looking at a screen non-stop. You may fear that if you give them a break, you'll lose them, but incorporating breaks will likely help hold their attention rather than lose it.

***Your audience has changed: remember that students are returning home to cultural differences that may not align with our (U.S., Boston, business school, Bentley, etc.) way of life.*** They may be negotiating new terms with family and navigating cultural differences. One foot in school- one foot at home can be tricky, complex, and heavy.

***Students likely have less control over their home environment than they did when they were on campus.*** Whether it's parents, guardians, or friend's families, it is unlikely the student is "Alpha" in their "home" environment. Encourage students to tell you if they are struggling to get work in and why. Respond kindly and flexibly while balancing the integrity of your course syllabus.

***Remember we don't always know student histories.*** If they have faced natural disasters, lived in war-torn countries, or experienced childhood trauma of abuse, neglect or addiction, COVID-19 may bring up similar feelings of fear and uncertainty that they have felt in the past. These students should be referred to support services to help them cope during this scary time.

***Some of us and our students will come to know loss from the virus.*** We have already heard of one student who lost his father last week. The sudden loss and unknown future, may come up for that student every time there is

a news story. The virus is most of the news these days, so students experiencing loss, may continue to be affected emotionally and psychologically every time a COVID-19 story surfaces. Be mindful that this kind of reliving the fear and loss can be, and often is, traumatic.

When and where it makes sense, ***share parts of this list with your students, especially if engaged in group projects*** where peer evaluations are an aspect of grading. Students can learn about others and ways to incorporate kindness, understanding, and empathy into leadership and group process.

We have a real opportunity to show (and model!) compassion, generosity, and mentoring to our students who are human beings, and yes, future leaders. ***These may be some of the most important lessons we teach.*** Stay well, all.