Teaching through H1N1 at ECU
September 2009

Ginny Sconiers: If H1N1 leads to the suspension of face to face classes or a large number of absences how can faculty prepare to continue instruction to those students who are well enough to participate?

This is Ginny Sconiers from Academic Outreach and today we will be talking with Mark Weitzel, from the College of Business, about his continuity of instruction plan. Mark, thank you for taking the time to talk with us this morning.

Our first question for you is what is the name of the course or courses you have developed your continuity of instruction plan for this semester?

Mark Weitzel: I actually have three separate plans, one to correspond to each of the courses that I teach. I teach finance 1904, which is a face-to-face personal finance management course and there is two sections of 250 students each in that course. I also teach introduction to corporate finance in a face to face setting and there is approximately 80 students in that course. I also teach the same course in an online distance education environment and I have 32 students in that course.

Ginny Sconiers: So then you have a mixture of face to face and distance education courses. How do you plan to communicate with your students if this type of situation arises?

Mark Weitzel: We actually started that communication process on the first day of class when we handed the syllabus out we pointed out to the students the introduction of the new paragraph that was recommended to be inserted into the syllabus. That stated that if there was a disaster or catastrophe where classes were suspended due to H1N1, that students would be expected to continue to participate through some method that professor let them know about.

Ginny Sconiers: How do plan to communicate directly with your students?

Mark Weitzel: In the event that this was invoked we would immediately contact them via email and through announce in Blackboard letting them know that classes were suspended. But that they were expected to continue to maintain their work and that information would be coming shortly to allow them to understand how it is they would be expected to continue to participate in the class.

Ginny Sconiers: Now you mentioned Blackboard, are there other technologies that you are using, I know you are teaching both face to face and online, and also what features are you using in Blackboard?

Mark Weitzel: Well the face to face classes are taught using PowerPoint and we took that technology and married it with the Camtasia technology in which allows us to capture our PowerPoint slides with a voice-over. Using that we created copies of our lectures so that in the event that classes have to be suspended we will use Camtasia to basically give the students the same classroom lecture that they would have had had they been coming to class.

Ginny Sconiers: How about Blackboard, what features are you using?

Mark Weitzel: In Blackboard we utilize the announce section to communicate with our students, we maintain discussion boards for the flow of information, and we also utilize Blackboard for quizzes and for testing. So in the event that classes have to be suspended as long as Blackboard can be maintained then we can continue on delivering our content and also assessing the students understanding of the material.

Ginny Sconiers: You have provided some background information, so at this point can you briefly describe your plan for us?

Mark Weitzel: Basically what we would do with the plan is look to take the face to face classes and turn them very, very quickly into distance education classes. So that the students could work at their own pace and this would allow some students that are ill not to fall behind. We would have to communicate to the students in a slightly different way then we do in the face to face class but we feel that we could comfortably do that. Now I use the word "we" because in the 1904 class I actually team teach it with another individual, so I have got somebody paired up with me to help me with that workload. And in the 3004 class there is one other section that is taught by an individual and I have paired up with him as well. So that we could step in for each other and help each other out.

Ginny Sconiers: That is a good idea, so you have a back up in the event that either one of you are ill.

Mark Weitzel: Yes.

Ginny Sconiers: What about your distance education class at this point. How would that change?

Mark Weitzel: The only change that I would make to the distance education class is an extension of any deadlines that would fall during the time that classes were suspended. That might even be implemented prior to the university suspending classes if I was getting enough feedback from my distance education students that they were ill because of H1N1 then we would look at just extending deadlines until the crisis had past. That is about all that would have to be done to the distance education course to make it manageable through any crisis.

Ginny Sconiers: How did you develop your plan?

Mark Weitzel: The idea for the plan came about last fall when I started thinking about hurricane Floyd and the impact that it had on the university at that time and that point we were only two years into Blackboard. So I started thinking about well what if we had another hurricane or some other disaster the forced the university to shutdown. For my students many of them are graduating seniors they needed a means to be able to complete the course that semester so that they could graduate. Coming back and repeating the course would not be an option for them. That is where I got the idea that I needed to have some type of continuity of instruction in case the university had to shut down.

Ginny Sconiers: What do you see as challenges to implementing your plan?

Mark Weitzel: The biggest challenge to implementing the plan is not knowing where in the semester you are going to have to jump in get started. It has got to be something that is very fluid and very flexible and that can change over time because you also don't know for how long you will have to implement the plan. We could end up going fine and doing great and all of a sudden be at the end of the semester and have this happen. Or as happened with Floyd, we could be in the middle of September just kind of getting started and lose two and half weeks. So the key to the plan is that it is very flexible it allows me to adjust on the fly depending upon the circumstances.

Ginny Sconiers: I think you have somewhat answered this question but I will ask it and see if you have anything to add. Do you feel that your current plan is applicable when classes are not suspended but you have a large numbers of absences or maybe you become ill, if not what do you foresee you would do?

Mark Weitzel: If the absences begin to increase because of H1N1 then we could kind of implement a hybrid situation where the Camtasia presentations would be available online to the students so that even though they can't physically come to class, and we don't want them coming to class at that point, they can still keep up with the class. The only modification that I feel we would have to make would be an extension on deadlines in terms of taking quizzes or exams. At that point we would probably make everything due by the end of the semester, so that students could at their leisure go in and complete the assignments and complete the exams without falling behind by the end of the semester.

Ginny Sconiers: We have one more questions for you. What advice do you have for someone just getting started developing their plan?

Mark Weitzel: The best advice I can give you is to find a partner. Most classes if there are multiple sections, if you can find someone else that is teaching a section in the same

thing that you are teaching pair up with them so that you can help and support each other in case you get sick or in case they get sick. If you are not teaching a course from a distance education perspective then that is probably the best approach to consider, is what you are really going to have to do is take this face to face class and very, very quickly turn it into a distance education class to meet the continuity of instruction.

Ginny Sconiers: Well we certainly appreciate you taking the time to talk with us the morning Mark. That is all the questions we have for you, so thank you again.